

A VAGABOND IN ASIA



พ.ร.บ.ที่ ๑๐๘๓, ๓๒๕๐๕

กระทรวงมหาดไทย

วันที่ ๕ เดือน มกราคม ร.ศ. ๑๑๖

เรื่อง ทิศ เกณฑ์
เกณฑ์ไปเมือง

เสนาบดีกระทรวงมหาดไทย

ถึงข้าหลวงและหัวราชการ

เมืองกรมการหัวเมืองราชทาง

ถ้ามีทิศ เกณฑ์ เกณฑ์คนผู้ชาวอังกฤษจะได้เดินทางทั้งนี้
เมืองหัวเมืองไปเมืองพระตะบองแต่เมืองนคร เขื่อนมราฐกษัตริย์นครวัดแล้ว
จะเดินทางออกนอกพระอารามอาณาจักร เขื่อนไปในเขตรมแดนฝรั่งเศส ถ้า
มีทิศ เกณฑ์ เกณฑ์คนผู้ชาวอังกฤษจะได้เดินทางมาถึงเขตรมแดนบ้านเมืองโค
กีสหัวเมืองและหัวราชการ เมืองกรมการรับรองจัดมาจ้างทหารและคน
นำทางให้ แล้วยังเรียกเก็บเงินแต่มีทิศ เกณฑ์ เกณฑ์ไปไม่ได้ไปมาโดย
สะดวกเรียบร้อย

๑๑๖
พระหัตถ์พระเจ้าบรมวงศ์เธอ

๑๑๖



BAN KOK FROM THE KINGS PALACE

Bangkok

~~A Bagabond in~~ Asia

BY

EDMUND (CANDLER)

*WITH A MAP OF THE AUTHOR'S ROUTE, AND
SEVERAL ILLUSTRATIONS FROM
ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPHS*

London

GREENING & CO., LTD

20 Cecil Court, St. Martin's Lane, W.C

1900

[All Rights Reserved]

PREFACE

IN bringing a book before the public an apology is usual, or it is at least customary to hint at some obligation discharged or benefit conferred. The author's motives, however, are purely selfish. His wanderings have been as aimless as a crooked path in the desert : his impressions of the men and places he visited are necessarily fragmentary. But these impressions are pleasant to look back upon. That they should be

arrested while still fresh, bound in cloth and pigeon-holed on a shelf for reference is a natural wish. With the exception of the journey to Cochin China these sketches are for the most part merely the expressions of moods inspired by new environments. In voyaging, the author has had no other purpose than to indulge the nomad's instinct of restlessness. He does not pretend to speak authoritatively on matters oriental.

The articles included in this volume, excepting the paper on Milarapa, have appeared already in various journals : and the author's thanks are due to the Editors of *The Pioneer*, *The Outlook*,

The Civil and Military Gazette and
Macmillan's Magazine for permission
to republish them.

WEYBREAD,

December, 1899.

To

O. M. T.,

this Book is Dedicated,

with the

Author's homage.

List of Illustrations

TO FACE PAGE

MAP OF AUTHOR'S ROUTE	
FACSIMILE OF PRINCE DAMRONG'S LETTER	
BANGKOK FROM THE KING'S PALACE	(<i>Frontispiece</i>)
SIAMESE GIRL	128
A CHILD OF NATURE	256
LAMA OF SIKHIM	187
ANGLE OF UPPER TERRACE, ANGKOR WAT	146
A CORNER OF OLD BANGKOK	11C
THE MENAM RIVER, BANGKOK	97
A SEA OF CLOUD, PHALLUT	172
SIAMESE RIVER SCENE	87
GOLD-BEARING QUARTZ AND COFFEE PLANT, TAVOY	34
KINCHINJUNGA FROM DARJEELING	18
TONGLU	180

CONTENTS

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

PAGE

I. REISELUST	15
II. A GLIMPSE OF TENASSERIM	21
III. HUNTED OVER THE BURMESE FRONTIER	43
IV. IN THE SIAMESE HINTERLAND	60
V. TO KANBURI	75
VI. BANGKOK	89
VII. IN THE SPHERE OF FRENCH INFLUENCE	106
VIII. AN OLD CAMBODIAN PROVINCE	126
IX. ANGKOR WAT AND THE GREAT LAKE	143

HIMALAYAN SKETCHES

I. THE DOMINANT RACE	167
II. A HIMALAYAN THEATRE	172
III. HIMALAYAN SONG	177
IV. A HILL SHIKARI	179
V. A SON OF BUDDHA	187

IN THE NEARER EAST

I. BY THE WATERS OF BABYLON	215
II. WITH THE CAMEL POST TO DAMASCUS	222

IN THE SOUTHERN SHAN STATES

I. TO TAUNGGYI	255
II. TO THE SALWEEN	272
III. A GREAT PRINCE	289

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

A VAGABOND IN ASIA

Off the Beaten Track

I

REISELUST

The spirit of vagabondage possesses the nation. Call it what you will, reiselust, or go-fever, we are most of us subject to the malady: driven to wander by the same uncontrollable impulse—naturalists, sportsmen, loafers, pioneers, cosmopolitans, climbers, explorers, bo-

A Vagabond in Asia

hemians, beach-combers, empire-builders, traders, poets, writers of books, and painters of pictures, goaded from land to land, as helpless as poor *Io* to fight against the gadfly of unrest. Many of us are furnished with no plausible excuse—I speak as a vagabond—we have no mission or message, have added nothing to science, made no collections or maps; neither have we converted the heathen, nor even tried or pretended to do any of these things: but in travelling we have simply obeyed an instinct, or been victimised by a disease, which has impelled us to abandon the comforts and luxuries of civilization, “all that ever went with evening dress,” and to embark in a succession of unnecessary and unimaginable hardships.

The sufferings which the vagabond has undergone when a victim to these strange attacks are amongst his most pleasant memories; for it is a symptom of the disorder that after each pilgrim-

Off the Beaten Track

age imagination subdues the memory of agonised endurance, smooths over the ruggedness of the journey, and paints in the brightest colours a canvas of unrelieved monotony and gloom. By an equally beneficent order of providence the initial stages of the malady are alleviated, and one is spared the horrors of anticipation. So it becomes part of the vagabond's philosophy to dwell in the past rather than to build on the future, and by voyaging he learns to regard the present, as grammarians do the future-perfect, not as a prominence from which we are to gaze into the unknown beyond so much as a period to which it will please us to look back when we have crossed the hills that lie before our path. The attitude is oriental. This way one forms a picture gallery in the mind, which is the inheritance of the traveller, the only fruition of his toil. His miseries are buried in a palimpsest of

A Vagabond in Asia

superadded emotions. The shadows fade soonest in the canvas of his past. I have often wondered what induces men to travel. For my own part I have always had a passion for crossing frontiers and striking a path through peninsulas which saner men "circumnavigate in ships; but in my most despondent moments I have regarded the instinct as a kind of disease. Not many months ago I was victimised by a particularly virulent attack of the disorder. My work lay in an Indian Hill Station, where it had been raining almost incessantly from the beginning of May to the end of September. The stagnation of a Government Sanatorium in the rains is enough to depress the most sedentary of natures. Even at the best of times the top of a hill is a kind of a prison, which incarcerates one with the thought that every step down entails a treble effort to regain the ground we have lost. Under such



KINCHINJUNGA FROM DARJEELING.

Off the Beaten Track

conditions life becomes a veritable treadmill. Besides it is hard to live up to the scenery of a place like Darjeeling; one's senses become affected with a plethora of beauty, and there are not enough distractions of the outer world to serve as a tonic. It is like living on oysters and champagne. In time, if one's artistic perceptions are acute, they become afflicted with a kind of spiritual gout. No wonder then that when the rains were ended and I found myself entitled 'to more than three months' furlough, I fell an easy victim to the malady. Of course I sought another horizon than the mountains.

The map of Asia lay before me, and I was instinctively guided to a peninsula. My malady generally took this form. Of all peninsulæ Malaya offered the most alluring attractions. It seemed absurd to me that any sane man should choose to go from Rangoon to Bangkok in a ship. The next question was where

A Vagabond in Asia

to cross: there did not appear to be scope for a long journey south of Tenasserim; so I decided to make Tavoy my starting point, and to strike overland to Bangkok.

II

A GLIMPSE OF TENASSERIM

It did not take long to get under way. My whole kit consisted of two portmanteaux, a small Gladstone bag, a pair of thick blankets, a 450 express rifle, a 12-bore shot gun, and a weighty cartridge-magazine. The few necessary cooking utensils and stores I purchased at Tavoy, and disposed of again when I reached the fringe of civilization. It is astonishing how quickly and cheaply one can travel in the Far East when unencumbered with an excess of camp paraphernalia. Very often one extra load nearly doubles the expense of a journey, and is the cause of repeated delays. Experience had taught me that

A Vagabond in Asia

travelling light is essential in a cross-country expedition of the kind, more especially when one is absolutely in the dark as to the means of transport, which is the crucial difficulty of all Asiatic travel. As it happened, my scanty equipment was more than⁹ sufficient, and I wished myself well rid of half the encumbrance before I was clear of the Burmese frontier.

Tavoy is reached by a weekly British India steamer, which plies between Rangoon and Mergui. The boat is subsidized by Government, as there is very little traffic down the coast.

One knows the kind of country that is associated with an Indian trading port; the barren environs of Karachi, the Hooghly mouth, the monotonous stone-wall bleakness of Madras, and the colourless Rangoon river. Travellers in the East are familiar with the interminable stretches of level paddy fields or low-lying jungle scrub,

Off the Beaten Track

and the monotony of barren land broken here and there by stunted palm trees and squalid native huts, where there is barely grass enough to lend a niggard existence to a score of lean and miserable buffaloes. After long voyages in ocean liners between ports of this kind, it is refreshing to find oneself in a clean little coasting steamer, skirting the green slopes and emerald seas of Tenasserim and the Islands of the Tavoy and Mergui Archipelago. As we sailed round Cap Island to the Tavoy river, the woods were in their Autumn foliage, shedding their gold and crimson leaves into the sea. The water was clear as a mill race. All day long our course had lain between verdant islands, some round and conical, like sugar loaves, some rising almost precipitously out of the sea, thickly wooded to the water's edge, leaving the thinnest glittering margin of sand. It was as lovely a seascape as I have seen

A Vagabond in Asia

anywhere. At the end of the peninsula, on the high rocks that overlook the thin belt of water between Cap Island and the mainland, the Buddhist priests have built a monastery and pagoda. Here they live their hermit life of solitude and seclusion ; a small fishing boat, the only link between them and the outer world, carries them their rice and the daily necessities of life.

For a long distance the Tavoy river is separated from the sea by a narrow strip of land, so that after rounding the Cap we found ourselves sailing almost due north in a line directly parallel to that which we had followed down the coast. Mountains shut in the view on either side. Tavoy itself is the most sylvan little port imaginable. The shipping by the quay, if one may call it so, is limited to two or three Chinese junks with their curious painted poops and picturesque rigging ; the British India steam launch that meets the weekly Rangoon

Off the Beaten Track

Mergui boat at the mouth of the river, and a few native fishing vessels. There is no babel of clamouring coolies ashore, no din of rival *gharry-wallahs* and *sampan-men*; the place is peaceful and retired, out of the world, a rustic fishing village, untainted as yet by the vices of the more enlightened East. A few Burmans and Chinamen watch our arrival with leisurely interest from the quay, and one of them offers to fetch a bullock-cart to carry my luggage to the circuit-house.

European residents in the East are justly famed for their hospitality; yet their attitude towards travellers is often unsympathetic. Nothing can be more commonplace or devoid of interest to them than the land in which they drag out an involuntary exile. Apart from sport their interests are generally centred in European affairs, the Home mail, and the few makeshift European distractions which their colony affords. The globe-trotter, who arrives in a P. & O. and

A Vagabond in Asia

puts up at the best hotel or dāk-bungalow, as the case may be, is tolerated as a harmless eccentric. But the cross country vagrant is something worse; people living on the edge of nowhere have some suspicion of the hardships he must endure before he can arrive in their midst, or when he goes from them, before he can emerge on the other side. It is only natural that they should regard a man, who subjects himself unnecessarily to such an ordeal, as a dangerous lunatic. Very often the traveller is of the same opinion before he reaches his journey's end; and for this reason he is tongue-tied. Consistency demands a cheerful demeanour in the narrative of his sufferings, for the first note of complaint invariably brings down upon his head the crushing reply, "Why the blazes didn't you come by P. & O.?" The sanity of the retort is undeniable. We must at least be consistent in our malady, or our case is despicable indeed.

Off the Beaten Track

The most amusing instance I have heard of the true state of a traveller's condition being flashed upon him suddenly by outside criticism, is a story told against himself by a gentleman, who was so badly bitten by the disease as to feel compelled to drag his bicycle round the whole circumference of the globe's surface. One drizzling foggy day in China, he was ploughing his way through interminable muddy paddy fields, dead beat, ravenously hungry, a pitiful object in his drenched and tattered clothes, when he encountered a Chinese official who spoke a few words of English. The Chinaman, deploring the traveller's miserable condition, suggested that he would have found it easier to reach his destination on the coast by sea. The Englishman told him that he preferred his own route; in fact he liked "roughing it and adventure, and all that kind of thing." The Chinaman only said: "Oh I savvy, too muchee damned fool." He meant to be polite and sympathetic

A Vagabond in Asia

but his imperfect English supplied the key to the conundrum.

At Tavoy I could find out nothing about my intended route: rumours were plentiful, but vague and indefinite.* A.

* As there seems to be but little light on the subject it is as well to explain clearly what are the connections between Lower Burma and Siam. In taking the Tavoy route I chose one of two alternatives. Of the two overland routes, one leads from Moulmein, a journey of seven days to Raheng on the Mei Ping branch of the Menam, a good two hundred and fifty miles north of Bangkok; the other is from Tavoy to Myitta on the Tenasserim, down the stream for sixty miles to Amya or Hseng-byoo-deing, and over a low pass in the main range for which I can find no name in the maps, to a village on the Meinam-kwang-nau, and thence by canoe to Kanburi. From Kanburi it is not three days down the Meiklong by *sampan* to Ratburi, and from Ratburi Siamese launches run every day through a network of rivers and canals to Bangkok. The Raheng route, though the longer, is the easier, and the more frequented of the two. When in Phairin in the Patabang province of Eastern Siam I found that nearly all the Burman emigrants in the sapphire mines had shipped from Rangoon to Chantaboun *via* Singapore; a few of the poorer ones had come overland by Raheng to Bangkok, and thence to Chantaboun by sea, but none of them knew the Tavoy route. Indeed, there is no traffic by this track. The Burmans at Amya fear and avoid the Siamese over the frontier, and the two peoples hold little or no communication with one another. At Raheng there is more trade, the Indian rupee being current all over the north of Siam as far as Cheeing Mai; whereas in the south it is not recognised.

Off the Beaten Track

said the journey was impracticable, B. believed that the main street in Tavoy led right through without a break to Bangkok. C. thought it dangerous. D. predicted a comfortable journey. E. sudden death; but none of them knew or cared whether there was a track or not. One thing was certain: a gentleman of American fame, who started round the world in a paper suit for a wager, had arrived from Bangkok in an exhausted condition two winters before, and had been forwarded by public subscription in the British India boat to Rangoon. The incident seemed to have impressed the Tavoyans at the time, though I could learn no details of his story and have never heard of him since. But the journey had been done before and could be done again; moreover the fact of there being direct telegraphic communication with Bangkok showed that there could be no impediment save the difficulty of transport and the pos-

A Vagabond in Asia

sible opposition of the natives on the Siamese side. I telegraphed to Myitta the last post before the frontier, and received a reply that it would be impossible to persuade the natives to take their elephants across. This was discouraging, as it meant that I would have to depend on coolies for transport, and the Burman coolie is a most independent, independable being at all times, more especially when he lives on the very outposts of civilisation. The native population by the Siamese frontier consists almost entirely of Karens, a Highland gipsy race who have a very natural and rooted objection to bearing the white man's burden, so that it was not to be expected that they would fall in readily with my plan that they should carry it into another country, alien and inhospitable, and inhabited by a people whom they both feared and distrusted. I remembered too, that in dealing with them my natural eloquence would be

Off the Beaten Track

impeded by my imperfect Hindustani, which in its turn would have to be further diluted by my Mussulman bearers' rendering into a Burmese, which the Karen coolies would only imperfectly understand. Events showed that my fears on this head were well founded.

I spent a pleasant week at Tavoy before starting on my travels. Very good sport may be had in the neighbourhood, though I was not fortunate enough to bag anything larger than the ubiquitous barking deer. Natives are constantly bringing in the skins of tigers which they have trapped for rewards at Maung-ma-gon and Zadee by the coast. The low-lying scrub by the shore abounds in big game of all sorts, rhinoceros (the two-horned and the one-horned kind) bear, bison, elephants, leopards, black panthers, sambhar, wild pig and deer. In the rainy season bears are so plentiful that they have to be driven from the Dorians at night.

A Vagabond in Asia

The waters of the Mergul Archipelago and the adjacent coast line would be a paradise to the yachtsman, an ideal sailing ground over sparkling seas and amidst islands rank with tropical vegetation to the water's edge, that suggest to the mind's eye the South Seas and the Pacific rather than the Indian Ocean. A curious people inhabit these islands, the Saylems: the quaintest, shyest and most inaccessible of beings, who build no huts but live on the sea shore in their rude dug out canoes. They have a jargon of their own, these gipsies of the sea, which neither the Malays nor the Burmans understand. Very few white men have seen them, as they always hide at the approach of strangers. Occasionally an officer from a British India boat or a pearl fisher from Mergui has come upon them unawares, while shooting on the islands. They bear little resemblance in feature to the Burman or Malay, and are pro-

Off the Beaten Track

bably of some aboriginal stock. Here is a problem yet unsolved for travellers and ethnologists; a strange and mysterious people, living within a few hours of a populous European station (I refer of course to Mergui and its pearl fisheries), as little known as the savages of Central Africa, or the inhabitants of unexplored Tibet. No dangers or difficulties are involved in the quest, only a pleasant cruise over perfect sailing-ground, and along a coast that affords big game shooting as varied as anywhere east of Somaliland.

One hears very little of Tenasserim now-a-days. Some twelve years ago with Lower Burma it represented all our stake in the country, but since the annexation of Upper Burma in 1885 Government seems to have thrown it over like a disused toy. Poor Tenasserim! It is the sleepest dead-alivest corner of our possessions in the East. It might be described as the "vegetable

A Vagabond in Asia

garden of our estate in British Burma, and so it is likely to remain until such time as the gold boom will convert Tavoy into a miniature Klondike, and the old days of the Portuguese Pioneers will find an echo in the bustling emissaries of Lombard Street. Tavoy has a history. As early as the sixteenth century the Portuguese were sailing their argosies up the Pauktaing creek to their gold diggings on Mount Burney. Their shafts may be seen to-day, sunk to a depth of forty-five feet and tunnelled in a manner that suggests considerable engineering skill and geological knowledge. These are relics no doubt of the days of Andrea-Correa's expedition to Burma in 1519, when the Portuguese concluded a treaty with the King of Pegu's Viceroy at Martaban, and friendly trading relations were established between the two countries. Tradition, as preserved in the ancient records of the Piligi Tine



GOLD-BEARING QUARTZ AND COFFEE PLANT, TAVOY.

Off the Beaten Track

monastery, pictures them a "trouserred, bastard" race, working in their mines by day and retiring to their boats to sleep at night. Their junks came up the river in November, and left with their treasure early in May: they did not brave the monsoons. Tribute was paid to the Tavoy king in revenues of gold for the sacred images of Buddha, and tradition connects the rich gold ornamentation of the Hypongee Kyaung at Shwemuti with the early Tavoy mines. The pagodas and images in the district are exceedingly rich in gold. Much gold washing goes on in the Panktaing Chaung and the Tavoy river. The natives wash in the recognised manner and still employ the Portuguese panning dish, which they call *batta*. Nuggets have occasionally been found in the neighbourhood, and large lumps of gold are sometimes met with in Tavoy that can only be of local extraction.*

* If Tavoy has had a past, a future awaits it that will

A Vagabond in Asia

The population of Tavoy is very mixed. There are traces of the Sepoy element, relicts of the days when Tavoy was a penal settlement. The Chinese element is even more considerable than in Upper Burma. Many of the most wealthy and influential Chinaman live in houses luxuriantly fitted in European style. They own junks and stores, and trade seems to prosper with them. These, for the most part, marry Burmese women. The Burmese lady is thrifty and business-like, a direct contrast to the lazy listless Burman, who never does any work which he can avoid, and often leaves the entire support of his

eclipse any distinction that has marked its earlier days. Mr. Watson, who had sunk four shafts on his estate on Mount Burney, showed me certificates from the best analysts that certified the most extraordinary yields. The land is well situated for mining purposes, splendidly timbered, and crossed by a stream that will supply water for the boilers and batteries. Close at hand is the Pauktaing creek, a tidal river, three miles from the estate, which is quite close to Tavoy town, and may be reached in a *gharry* in half-an-hour.

Off the Beaten Track

household to his wife. The Burman is very fond of ostentation, and if by any chance he earns or inherits any money, he will very soon find some means of squandering it. The Celestial, on the other hand quietly amasses his hoard, and seems to shrink from the reputation of riches. It is small wonder that the Burman lady, with her business-like instincts and unbusiness-like brethren, is ready to share her fortunes with John Chinaman: the children of such a union possess the highest mercantile instincts. In Tavoy, as over all Burma, trade is almost entirely in the hands of Chinamen and the natives of India. Native trade counts for very little.

To the old residents in Burma the name of Tavoy is associated with silk and Dorians, silk of the finest, Dorians the most savoury, but for myself I shall not forget the rustic quietness of the place after the bustle of eastern harbours,

A Vagabond in Asia

the greenness of spring in late autumn, the golden paddy harvest, the old-world quay nestling amidst the encircling mountains, the high-sterned Chinese junks, twin eyed, their sombre sails reflecting the lurid glow of the setting sun, the picturesque native fishing boats with the quaint rigging, the ever-present pungent scent of the *nga-pé*, and the laughing Tavoy maidens with water lilies in their hair.

After a week spent at Tavoy I obtained my passes from the Deputy Commissioner and set out in an antiquated cab with my luggage piled on the roof, for Peguiye, some ten miles distant on the road to the frontier. It was a curious vehicle and might have been transported from the yard of a one-horse provincial railway tavern in a very agricultural district of the Eastern counties. The Tavoy *gharry-wallah* rivals the Neapolitan cabman for recklessness and incapacity.

Off the Beaten Track

We stopped at a small village half way to Peguiye for a beat, and bagged a couple of deer. Peguiye is a very pretty spot at the foot of the first low range of hills. A beautiful mountain stream flows beneath the rest-house and its clear waters are darkened by shoals of a large fish of the carp species, which lie just beneath the surface waiting for flies or anything that is thrown to them. I was meditating murder when my servant stopped me with, "Master no kill God's fish." Then I knew that they were the sacred fish of the Buddhist priests, which are religiously fed and preserved by native piety and English laws. The custom of consecrating fish to Buddha remains in other parts of Burma, more especially in the upper reaches of the Irrawaddy. The next morning I was fortunate enough to secure a fine male elephant to take me on my way to Myitta, a two days' journey. The road after Penguiye be-

A Vagabond in Asia

comes a six foot path, in many places hewn out of the solid rock and winding above the Peguiye stream over a low pass in the hills. The scenery here is very beautiful. Often our path lay along the bed of a stream under the arching green of the oak leaves with the limpid water bubbling to the rocks beneath.

We made Wagoun our halting place that night. The country is very thinly populated here: there is no village, only the rest-house. I met but one human being between Tavoy and Myitta, a Karen policeman, who called himself a "suffocated" (certificated?) "interpreter," but I never found out what languages he interpreted, as these were the only words of his I could understand. At Wagoun my Mahommedan servant, Shafraz, gave an amusing instance of his fidelity. I found him haggling with the rest-house *durwan* about the price of a hen. The *durwan's* fowls are a

Off the Beaten Track

little wild at Wagoun, and after half-an-hour's ineffectual efforts to catch one he asked me to shoot the bird; whereupon my boy argued that a fowl which was so unamenable to the domestic proprieties as to run wild in the jungle and refuse to be caught was not a private fowl at all, but *ipso facto* a mere jungle *murghi*, and to ask six annas for a bird which his master had to waste good cartridges upon, was a most excessive demand, and not to be considered for a moment. I am afraid his zeal was not in his master's cause.

The next morning we started early for Myitta. The path from Wagoun descends for miles between walls of the most impenetrable, tropical vegetation. Myitta, a Karen village, is the only station between Tavoy port and the Siamese frontier. It boasts a telegraph office and a small detachment of Karen police. Amongst the inhabitants are very few Burmans. The Karens, a Highland

A Vagabond in Asia

gipsy race, are, as a rule, better featured than the Burmans. I saw some remarkably good looking men and women in Myitta,—faces full of expression, preserving in middle age a grace and simplicity almost childlike. The high protruding cheek bone of the Burman is less pronounced in the Karen. I met grey-haired old women without a wrinkle, their chins perhaps a little less dimpled and more angular than in girlhood, but with cheeks still rounded and even babyish. They take life very easily, these Karens, and have little to trouble them.

III

HUNTED OVER THE BURMESE FRONTIER

My movements at Myitta were unexpectedly hastened by a message that I received from Tavoy, and my plan of striking overland to Bangkok was very nearly frustrated at the outset. I owe it indirectly to the *Sabo Pho Pway* that I was not conducted back to Tavoy by a detachment of the Myitta police. I am also indebted to a rascally Karen who stole my dug-out canoe. If there is one thing more exciting than hunting it is being hunted oneself. That was my experience on the Burmese frontier; but in unfolding my story it is necessary to explain how the *Sabo Pho Pway* and the Kareni thief intervened.

A Vagabond in Asia

The *Sabo Pho Pway** is the annual threshing fête of the Karens, a kind of lay harvest festival, which is held in December, when the paddy is reaped, and friends are invited to tread it down to the music of rustic pipes. The telegraph clerk at Myitta had taken to wife a Burman lady, whose family had made a small clearing and planted a paddy-field far away in the jungle by a branch of the Tenasserim river: paddy land is very scarce about Myitta, and the crop fetched a high price. As a friend of the family I was bidden to the feast. At nine in the evening two large elephants were driven up to the

* Another festival that is affected by the Karens in this part of Burmah is the *Ah Yaw Poway*, or bone dance. It is a feast that is given in memory of a dead man by his relatives a year or more after his decease. The bones of the dead man are dug up, cleaned, and laid in a chatty, a pole is driven into the ground, and the chatty is placed beneath it, together with the cooking pots, clothes, and all the dead man's effects that may remain. Friends and relations are bidden and dance solemnly round the pole to slow music; at daybreak a feast is given and the bones reverently interred.

Off the Beaten Track

telegraph office, so that we could step into the howdah from the upstairs verandah (houses in Burmah are built on piles and have no ground floor). Then followed a ride of four miles through the forest, with the thick tangle overhead tearing at the howdah. The Karen elephant-boy spoke to his beast in short expostulatory sentences, emphatically as to a younger brother; and when he stopped to pluck a fresh young sapling shoot or threatened us with an untimely bath, corrected him with a cruel blow of his *dah* on the forehead, which resounded through the forest like the felling of a tree. The elephants pushed on in their slow, patient, unconcerned way, and brought us at last to the rapids of the Tenasserim. The ripple of the stream was merged with the distant sound of revelry from the further bank. The tall white trunks of the cotton trees rose spectral before us, their darker

A Vagabond in Asia

crests lost in the shadows. When we reached the clearing, the moon had risen above the tops of the gigantic trees that fringed the paddy-field. We entered upon a scene of the purest rusticity. The Karens were holding *nautch* on the threshed grain; the buffaloes had done their work earlier in the evening. Dishevelled youths were dancing grotesquely to an uncouth measure, holding their long tapering reed instruments in one hand, and waving the other in time with the strange contortions of their bodies. Here was the home of Pan, the revel and the rout of Comus; here was Bacchus with his hair unbound waving in the wind, and here Silenus prone upon the ground. Syrinx was warbling on her pipe amidst the reeds. It was Pan's pipe of seven tubes of gradually increasing length. Ovid has described it to the letter.* Presently the dancers

* "*Sic rustica quondam*

Fistula disparibus paulatim surgit avenis."

Off the Beaten Track

flung themselves on the ground; one only was left, a clownish fellow dancing to his own pipe. He became the sport of all, as he played a mimic courtship, the veriest pantomime of love. It was an echo of a Theocritean idyll. Seated on the ground amongst the ring of spectators was a young girl with dark piercing Spanish eyes, pretty pouting lips and dimpled cheeks, a handsome Karen maiden, without doubt the fairest of the guests. She was singing prettily to a reed accompaniment. To her, amidst the bucolic merriment of the crowd, the clownish youth directs glances of the tenderest appeal, striking fantastic and ludicrous attitudes, invoking the stars, and placing a quivering hand on his breast. The girl averts her eyes disdainfully. Then a rival appears and seats himself by her side. The girl, a daughter of Eve, with mischief written on every line of her face, throws an approving glance of welcome at the

A Vagabond in Asia

newcomer. This was too much for the amorous clown, who casts himself despairingly at her feet, and receives the rebuff direct, to the intense amusement of the spectators. He is voted a droll dog and retires, not displeased with his part.

It is now three or four in the morning and the guests settle down into groups of twos and threes; some wrap themselves in their blankets and wait for sunrise, others gossip and eat and drink and play dice; grog is flowing plentifully. I bestir myself to find my *mahout*, and discover him at last in the prone Silenus, no longer a picturesque addition to an old-world idyll, but a sodden brute of the nineteenth century, drunk and incapable, and helpless to move hand or foot in my behalf. We questioned him as to where he had left the elephant, but he only rolled over and said he didn't know. So we left him there and waited an hour in

Off the Beaten Track

hopes that he might sleep off the effects of his debauch. Eventually we procured another man who found our elephant and guided us home over the rapids and through the jungle to Myitta; but I never saw that *mahout* again.

The sun had risen when we reached the rest-house at Myitta, and I found my Karen boatmen, father and son, waiting to tell me that my canoe had been stolen in the night. I had intended to leave Myitta that morning for Sinbyoodine, sixty miles down the Tenasserim river, and a short march from the Siamese frontier. I was going to spend a week or ten days there shooting, but fortunately the fates intervened. In the afternoon a message arrived for me from a friend in Tavoy, advising me to make all haste, as the police intended to prevent me crossing the frontier. My boatmen had just returned with the canoe, which had been

A Vagabond in Asia

stranded some six miles down stream by my rascally benefactor, who must have used it to convey him to some *Pway*, and Karen-like preferred walking home through the jungle to the labour of struggling against the current in another man's craft. If it had not been for the *Saba Pho Pway* I would have left Myitta before I received warning of the intended pursuit; the sergeant of the police, and the three men who were sent after me, would have caught me up at Sinbyoodine and my chance of escaping over the frontier would have been very small indeed. As it was, I knew that I had only a few hours' start, but I was determined at any cost to give them the slip. There could be no possibility of obtaining carriers at Sinbyoodine, if it became known that the authorities had sent out men to bring me back. In the event of the police arriving at Sinbyoodine before I had time to make

Off the Beaten Track

good my escape, I had resolved to abandon the whole of my kit, and to set out for the frontier at night with only my gun and revolver, a few cartridges, a small bag of food, and a pocketful of rupees. Even with this scanty equipment I would be better off than my American predecessor in his paper suit. I had calculated that the Oriental mind could not conceive of a white man relinquishing six coolie-loads of paraphernalia, and I pictured the Karen policemen waiting patiently by the baggage for my return. Once over the frontier I would be beyond their reach.

I had some difficulty in persuading my boatmen to start that night, as it wanted but an hour to sunset, and the river, dangerous at any time, is quite impossible in the dark. But at length *bacsheesh* and persuasion prevailed, and an hour's paddling brought us several miles down stream to a sandy island

A Vagabond in Asia

between two rapids where we encamped for the night. We started before sunrise the next morning, and I knew we had a few hours' start of the police. That day in a canoe on the Tenasserim river was the most exciting and exhilarating method of travelling I have experienced. In places the stream was a mere torrent and we saw the river below us islanded with rocks like the bed of a mountain watercourse: at times our descent was almost precipitous, and it required the greatest strength and coolness on the part of our boatmen, and a perfect knowledge of the river, to steer the canoe safely over the rapids. We negotiated some almost impossible places. Often we were swept down with the current for miles in the deeper reaches, drifting silently between cliffs and bluff rock. Sometimes we disturbed a family of chattering magpies, or spread consternation amongst a cohort of gibbons, who crashed through the

Off the Beaten Track

branches in flight, their weird, human lamentations growing fainter and fainter in the distance like the agonised utterance of distressed children, when they are borne away in their nurse's arms. Every now and then my Karens turned aside into a backwater to chew their beloved betel-nut, but I impressed upon them the necessity of haste, and I flattered myself that these halts would be more frequent with my pursuers who had no white man in command. Moreover I had purposely given out at Myitta that I intended to spend a fortnight at Sinbyoodine shooting, so that they might have the less fear of finding their quarry flown.

We camped that night on an island a few miles above Sinbyoodine. After the evening meal I wiled away an hour watching my boatmen, father and son, at their dice. They played for modest stakes and decided the cast after the manner of the Chinese, by the colour not the number of

A Vagabond in Asia

the throw. The Karens are great gamblers. There is a story of a detachment that was recruited for work in the Shan States. They were a raw lot and quite childishly delighted with their smart uniforms, *kukris*, and rifles. But when they mustered for drill one morning the inspector was not a little dismayed to find that several of them had left their rifles behind. The mystery was solved when one of them appeared in the barrack-yard with an ingenuous smile and the rifles of six of his companions. He had won them all at dice the night before. Everyone who knows him speaks of the Karen as a good fellow, generous, cheerful, and happy-go-lucky like his brother Burman; as lazy perhaps, but better plucked, and ready to share his last piece with a friend. The Karen policemen, with their short, stubby figures, broad, squat faces and close-cropped hair are remarkably like the Gurkhas, and in their khaki uniform might easily be mistaken for them.

Off the Beaten Track

They have the same cheerful disposition, the same keenness for sport, and I believe they fight well.

I did not see any drill at Myitta. Burmese football seemed to be the order of the day in the barrack-yard. Shway Poh, the sergeant, was away on tour. One hears a great deal of Shway Poh at Tavoy : he is regarded as a pillar of the British Government, but he is a man with a history, and there are stories of more irresponsible days on the Siamese side of the frontier ; but we must remember Shway Poh now as a bulwark of British prestige. There is not a better man anywhere to catch a thief or run down a dacoit.

Close to the police barracks at Myitta is a native Baptist church. There are no missionaries in the neighbourhood, but Christianity has spread widely among the Karens from the American Baptist missions in the Kareni district proper. The Karen converts observe the Sabbath with Scotch precision ; no doubt its observance falls in

A Vagabond in Asia

with their happy, indolent disposition, which would embrace eagerly a creed that offered them seven days of rest in the week. It is a little disconcerting for a keen sportsman, who has lost all account of the calendar in this remote corner of the world, to be told, when ready equipped for a day's shooting, that it is impossible to obtain beaters because it is Sunday.

On the morning of the second day after leaving Myitta we arrived at Sinbyoodine and immediately set about procuring coolies for our journey, always a difficult task in Tenasserim, and almost hopeless among these independent, gypsy Karens. Luckily I had, besides my passport, a letter from the Superintendent of Police ordering the *Thugees*, or headmen of the villages, to give me every assistance on my way. It was gratifying to think that we were playing the police as our trump-card when in all probability they were in hot pursuit with orders to prevent us crossing the frontier at any cost. But it was too close a thing

Off the Beaten Track

to be amusing. The *Thuggee* assured me that it was impossible to get coolies that day, but sent men out to secure them for the morrow. It was an anxious time. The next morning at eight o'clock they had not come: at ten they arrived with salaams and protestations. The position was very critical: they squatted round me in a circle, while with the help of my bearer and the *Thuggee* I expostulated with them until noon, offering them more than double wages if they would accompany me as far as the first village in Siam where I could get bullock-carts or a boat, and threatening the anger of the police if they refused. Every now and then one of them would rise and salaam and say that nothing would induce him to go, then others followed suit and I had to begin all over again. This went on until an argument arose that it was too late to start that day, whereupon I began to apportion my kit and saddle each man with it, pushing him gently towards the door, when to my delight

A Vagabond in Asia

and surprise I found ourselves started at last on the road to the frontier—six coolies, including the two Karen boatmen whom I had impressed into my service, my bearer, and myself whipping in. A few hours later a sergeant of the police and three men arrived from Myitta with orders to turn me back. They were too late.

I learnt afterwards that a telegram arrived for me at Myitta on the evening of my departure. The telegraph-clerk sent word back that I had gone. The next message was to the sergeant of the police, ordering him to follow and bring me back. He left Myitta at noon the next day with three men and arrived at Sinbyoodine the same evening that I left for the frontier. It was fortunate for all concerned that the ministers of justice* did not follow me into Siam.

This sudden panic of the Police arose, I believe, from a grandmotherly anxiety for my safety. Their interference,

Off the Beaten Track

though doubtless well-intended, was quite unwarranted, and it only points to the ignorance of the authorities at Tavoy of the country beyond the frontier. There was no likelihood of danger or possibility of political complications arising from my journey; and, having obtained a passport from the civil authorities, it was beyond the province of the Police to interfere.

The pursuit gave rise to some amusing rumours concerning me at Tavoy. Some credited me with having robbed a bank and made off with the plunder. Others put me down for a Russian spy with a portfolio full of photographs of the fort at Rangoon; others for an engineer of the Irawaddy Company, an inspector of gold-mines, an impostor, anything in fact from an escaped lunatic to Prince Henry of Orleans.

IV

IN THE SIAMESE HINTERLAND

What is the natural impression that the word "frontier" presents to the mind unacquainted with Burma and Indo-China? Is it a hard and fast line sternly laid down by nature before the flood, a barrier that has spoken finality to neighbouring tribes for centuries past, a mountain range stretching north and south and commanding a prospect for leagues to east and west, so that a man standing on its summit can point and say, "That is your country, this is mine"? Or does one pass gradually and imperceptibly from one people to another, through a country where Burmans and Siamese live and work

Off the Beaten Track

together and intermarry, where both languages are spoken and the rupee and *tical* exchanged indifferently? The first picture appeals to the decorative imagination; instinct suggests it, and it is in sympathy with that vague spirit of unconfinedness of body and mind that is the motive of all travelling; the same spirit that in its germ tempts a child to stand over a parish boundary post with one foot in one parish and one in another, and induces people to picnic on a hill, whence they can obtain a view of five counties.

It would have been disappointing had there been no distinct indication of where British territory ended and Siamese began. As a matter of fact, the boundary line is very definite. Arrived at the summit of the ridge, at an elevation of some 3000 feet, one can see the hilly tract of Tenasserim, a densely wooded undulating country stretching beyond the river to the last line of

A Vagabond in Asia

hills on the horizon fronting the Mergui coast. Eastward stretches Siam, and the eye is arrested by precipitous cliffs, bare and jagged, lighted with the metallic glare of the setting sun. It is the one commanding prospect in the route between Tavoy and Bangkok, the only spot where the eye can rest at once on Burma and Siam. At this point the six-foot road that has taken us from Tavoy ends abruptly a few furlongs after the 107th mile. The long grass in front of us is a symbol of the inhospitable country across the frontier; a little bristling barrier, the merest hint, no more, a warning that the Shan* extends no welcome to the stranger that is without his gates. The little road behind us so neatly cut out of the hill side suggests a 'neglected overture to friendship, a hand held out in vain. The two countries are as distinct as

*The natives on the Siamese side of the frontier are not Shans proper, but I have used the term as it is applied to them by the Burmans in Tenasserim.

Off the Beaten Track

possible: there is little or no communication between them. The Burmans and Karens look upon the Shan as a barbarian; they dare not take their elephants across the frontier. My coolies were very nervous about entering a village at night. They slept huddled together, and one kept watch. All this fear and precaution was no doubt exaggerated and unnecessary, a memory of thirty years ago when the Shan dacoit was a terror in the land.

That night we made about a mile beyond the frontier, and stopped to camp by a muddy little spring in the long grass, a place much too stony and perpendicular to serve as a comfortable bed. We were entertained by an orchestra of mosquitoes and frogs, and in trying to exterminate a solo from the latter we awoke a chorus, that kept us awake with their raucous protests until morning. But I was in the best of spirits, for having once crossed the frontier and evaded the

A Vagabond in Asia

Police I felt confident that I would be able to get through to Bangkok whatever happened to my kit. The next morning I was agreeably surprised to find my coolies ready and willing to proceed. I had half expected to find them flown, and myself sitting alone in the midst of my baggage, or as much of it as they had been considerate enough to leave behind. The going was as bad as it could be, long thick grass, neck high, and swampy ground intersected by continuous little streams, unbridged and waist deep. In Siam there are neither bridges nor roads; here there was not even a track. In the more populous parts, when a man goes from one village to another, he follows his own path, so that instead of roads there are only rough wheel-tracks, sometimes a quarter of a mile broad, and it is very easy to lose one's way, as I found afterwards to my cost, by taking a track too much to the left or right. Here the telegraph-posts served as a guide.

Off the Beaten Track

Nothing could have indicated the Siamese frontier more surely than the spot where our lines stopped and their miserable caricatures began. There were posts of all sizes and materials, at irregular intervals ; wires fixed anyhow to the insulators, with long irresponsible tags hanging down on each side ; the insulators fastened sometimes to the trunk of a tree or a rotten stump. It is little wonder that the line of communication with Bangkok is frequently blocked.

After five miles of very rough going we arrived at a small village. This was my first introduction to the Siamese : I was not agreeably impressed. We made a halt at the headman's house, where we became objects of considerable interest. Our host was without exception the ugliest and most evil-looking specimen of humanity I have ever set eyes on ; it was evident that the whole village was in mortal terror of him. Short, squat, and immensely powerful, with the physique of

A Vagabond in Asia

a bull and the presence of a toad, he presented the embodiment of avarice and truculence. His women-kind were equally unattractive. We arrived at the village before nine in the morning, but my coolies resolutely refused to go further. I had promised them double rates for the journey, with the distinct understanding that they should accompany me to the village, wherever that might be, where I could get a boat or a bullock-cart to take me on to Kanburi; but it was evidently not for money that they had been induced to come with me, but from fear of the *thuggee*, who was influenced by the letter that I carried from the Superintendent of the Police ordering all headmen of villages to assist me on the way. Three of them left me without receiving a pice for their pains, rather than continue another day's march. Three remained, including my Karen boatmen, father and son, who had stood by me all through, though always the first to lay down their packs at the

Off the Beaten Track

slightest hint of desertion. My truculent host offered to supply the place of the deserters with three stalwart Shans. His rates were exorbitant, but as he was master of the situation, there appeared to be no alternative but to accept them. Perhaps if I had haggled with him like an Edinburgh fishwife, I might have been saved many subsequent embarrassments; for the Oriental looks upon the ready giver as his dupe, and the easier he finds it to extract money the more insistent he becomes in his demands. I had cause to repent my shortsightedness on the morrow.

A wearisome day of waiting was the prelude to many of the kind. There is no sport to be had in the vicinity of these frontier villages, as they are surrounded by the most impenetrable jungle and the natives are no *shikaris*, though big game abounds. The very next day I came across the fresh spoor of a tiger and heard another at night, and the country we passed through was literally

A Vagabond in Asia

trampled down by elephants. Birds there are none, save the ubiquitous dove. I was reduced ere long, when provisions ran short, to stalking them, like Tartarin, for the sake of the pot. The coolie load of cartridges that I took with me were quite useless and I had to dispose of them at my journey's end. Of course, it may be reasonably objected, that one cannot speak with authority on the sporting resources of a country until one has pitched camp and taken bearings in the same district for at least a fortnight. It is quite impossible to combine cross-country travelling with big game shooting in this part of the East; but from personal observation of a very large tract of country, and by comparing notes with the few Europeans one meets, it is not difficult to arrive at a very fair estimate of Siam as a field for sport. I met but three white men in Siam outside Bangkok, and they were all of the opinion that from a sporting point of view the country

Off the Beaten Track

is hopeless. Other travellers have told the same story.*

It was in this frontier village that I made the appalling discovery that the British rupee was not current in the south of Siam. In Cheng Mai and the north it is the standard coin, and I had fondly believed my informants in Tavoy who told

* Major Younghusband in his "Eighteen Hundred miles on a Burmese Tat," writes :—"I think Siam may be considered one of the worst countries in the East from a sporting point of view. We travelled over some 1800 miles of country : sometimes through dense hilly forest, sometimes across open level grassy plains, and sometimes by boat along magnificent rivers, and yet we saw no game or even tracks of any game. A hare was the largest wild beast we came across, and only one of him ; we also had the good fortune to encounter one partridge and two bush quail. Finally during a 500 mile river journey, we saw only one solitary flight of teal. This seems strange, for the greater part of our journey was through a virgin country that had never been shot over, and as a rule in such countries animal life both sporting and otherwise abounds."

Shortly before my arrival in Bangkok Mr. Whitney, who is well known as a keen and successful *shikari*, had just come back from a sporting expedition into the interior among the Karen hill-tribes. The Karens have the reputation of being good *shikaris* on both sides of the frontier ; but Mr. Whitney returned without securing a single head. He had seen nothing but deer.

A Vagabond in Asia

me that it would take me all over the southern provinces. The fact that the rupee is almost valueless at a distance of some twenty miles from the Burmese frontier is significant of the state of communication between the two countries. Mine host obligingly presented me with twelve *ticals* of Siamese money, reserving for himself the extremely modest profit of cent. per cent. The exchange was concluded after nightfall, as his treasury was buried in the adjoining jungle, and he did not wish to tempt his subjects by exposing its whereabouts. Twelve *ticals* was not a large sum to take me over 200 miles by land and water in a strange country, but it might come in useful at a crisis.

We spent that night in vainly battling with mosquitoes. The next morning our truculent host appeared in his true character. He refused to supply the three coolies which he had promised the day before, unless we delivered to

Off the Beaten Track

him before we started twice the exorbitant sum he had demanded, to be paid in Siamese money. He squatted stolidly, the evil light of satisfied avarice in his eyes : argument was useless. The picture was so disgusting and repellent that I was more concerned in defeating his greed than anything else. If I had paid him, the coolies no doubt would have sat down half a mile from the village and demanded more. Already he looked upon us as his victims. I was very glad to find a way out of the difficulty by reducing the three loads to two, taking one myself and giving the other to my bearer. It was gratifying to hear my host's last words : "Give, give, now. I will kill my men, if they do not go with you." I replied : "If your men follow me, I will shoot them. When I arrive in Bangkok I will procure your immediate execution." It was after seven when we left the village, and all that day our path lay

A Vagabond in Asia

through the same trackless country, plunging through streams and marshes. It was lucky that we had one coolie left who knew the country and acted as our guide. The heat was intense : my load consisted of a '450 Express rifle and a heavy portmanteau, which I could barely lift, containing clothes, books, provisions and cartridges. We pushed on the whole day, only stopping an hour at noon for tiffin, and for an occasional five minutes' rest. I kept tripping and falling in the long grass, having to disentangle myself each time from my portmanteau, before I could regain my feet. The ropes cut like a knife, and for hours before we halted the whole of my body felt numb above the waist. At last an hour and a half after nightfall we sank exhausted in the long grass, and slept where we lay, too tired to think of food, and despairing of reaching the village that night. My coolies were afraid of sleeping in the open lest they should be

Off the Beaten Track

trampled on by the elephants, whose tracks we had been crossing the whole day. They were too much afraid of the Shans to sleep in a village so far from the frontier. But where was the village? We must have gone twenty miles that day, yet there were no signs of it.

The next morning I shouldered my kit again. It was a mere farce, as I knew I could not struggle far. We were to breakfast at the first stream. I led the cavalcade. To my unutterable joy on turning a corner I saw the village in front of me, across a lotus pool not two hundred yards from our camping ground. I dropped the portmanteau in the grass. It was not seemly for a white man to enter a Siamese village burdened like an ass. The village was there, and just waking into life. It was no dream. There was a little group of Siamese viewed indistinctly across the white mists that hovered over the pool. I could see

A Vagabond in Asia

their thick, matted hair, and the white and red shawls flung over their shoulders to keep off the chill morning airs. To my numbed and half-awakened senses they suggested some ferry-load of spirits that Charon had left chattering on the other side of Styx. But beyond them was a dear reality, three fat bullocks browsing in imbecile content. Never have these ungainly, unromantic beasts been the cause of such extravagant joy, the object of such heartfelt benedictions.

V

TO KANBURI

As the travelling circus is to the rustic of remote Britain, so is the arrival of the white man to the natives of the Hinterland of Siam, only to the native mind the phenomenon is infinitely more eccentric and grotesque. As far as I could learn, only three white men had passed between Tavoy and Bangkok during the last ten years, one of whom was the gentleman of American fame who walked round the world for a wager in a paper suit. No doubt the paper suit man with his niggard lack of accessories was voted a very one-horse affair by the gilded youth of the valley of the May-nam-kway-naiu-ey; but here was a

A Vagabond in Asia

different show, a real *farang* with his six coolie-load of paraphernalia, each pack a chapter of revelations in itself. We had not been in the village five minutes before we were encircled by a gaping, imbecile audience, who squatted round the stump which my servant had laid as a breakfast table. On these occasions meals were the most trying ordeal. When my man had lit the fire and was manipulating the saucepan and frying-pans, it was a signal for the village to collect: word was passed round that the entertainment was about to begin. Then, if it was dinner-time, the thin disc of light shed by a flickering candle would reveal a circle of imbecile faces peering inquisitively at the banquet. I have seen the same expression of amused and interested pity in the features of a crowd that has gathered to watch a funny animal being fed at the Zoo. My every movement was watched with rapt attention. Occasion-

Off the Beaten Track

ally an idiotic guffaw would break from the ring, and a finger would be raised indicative of clownish merriment at some more than ordinary grotesque manifestation, such as the application of knife and fork. But it was the extremely inane and unprepossessing pose of these people that I found most irritating. They would sit motionless, with head thrown back, mouth open, like young blackbirds in the nest, and lips parted in a vacuous, idiotic grin, which every now and then found expression in a burst of meaningless laughter. I could read their witticisms in their glances. "What quaint savagery!" "Did you ever see such a hat, for all the world like an inverted mushroom?" "What features and what a complexion! How horribly colourless! Does it always eat like that?" A deep-drawn, guttural note of assent, ridiculously expressive of the animalism within, greeted all these witticisms. I was generally too

A Vagabond in Asia

tired and hungry to trouble much about my audience; but at times, to restrain the impulse that prompted me to empty my revolver in their midst, I would lie back and swear softly, commenting freely on their manners and their far from picturesque personal appearance. Indeed the women, with their short cropped hair and ungainly figures, were inexpressably hideous.

Of my kit my guns were of course the chief attraction, and I had to keep a sharp eye on them. One youth offered the princely sum of twenty *ticals* for my double barrellled shot gun. I dismissed him with a gaudy college boat tie, which I adjusted to his bare neck and shoulders in the most correct fashion. It was his only raiment save a rather scanty loin cloth. By this device I ceased for a moment to be the centre of attraction.

But to return to our village. We parted with our coolies, who went off

Off the Beaten Track

well paid and well pleased. I had become quite attached to my Karens, who were pleasant good humoured fellows. They are confirmed gamblers, these Karens, and no doubt before they had reached Sinbyoodine their combined earnings had filtered into the pocket of one of them more fortunate than the others. Shafraz, my Mussulman servant, was well rewarded for his day's work. He was the most willing servant it has been my fortune to meet with. When my coolies deserted, he took up his pack without a murmur, and carried it on his head the whole day. He must have suffered terribly, for it was easy to see that he was no more used to being made a beast of burden of than I was. I engaged him in Tavoy, and he followed me blindly without the least idea where he was going, or when, if ever, he would return; into alien countries, amongst people whose language was as unintel-

A Vagabond in Asia

ligible to him as it was to me, and whose sympathies were as widely separated from his as they were from mine; in a land of pigtails and porkiness, amongst porky Chinamen, who must have filled his Mahommedan soul with loathing. Poor Shafraz! fever attacked him, but he suffered uncomplaining, and was always assiduous in his duties, sad without reproach. When he had been away from home for two months the shadow of hopeless dejection settled on him, and I bitterly reproached my selfish improvidence in taking with me a Mahommedan servant. But Shafraz had the rare virtue of being able to produce in the middle of the jungle a first-rate dinner of the most meagre materials. I expected at least five or six courses, soup, fish (when procurable), omelettes, chicken, cheese and dessert. But after crossing the frontier, chicken had to be replaced by doves; for the Siamese, whether it be that they are too true

Off the Beaten Track

to their Buddhist principles to take life, or that they look upon the fowl only as an egg-producing creature, would never kill or sell me a chicken. Later, on the other side of Bangkok, when necessity compelled me, I used to shoot them down and appease the owner's conscience (no difficult task) with a *douceur*.

The history of the next few days is monotonous. The headman of the village offered for two *ticals* to take us in his bullock cart to a village where we could get a boat, but he stopped short of it, making an early halt and refusing to go on. The next morning he demanded two more *ticals* to continue the journey. We started at seven, and arrived at a group of houses by the river in little more than an hour. The headman was out, and it was necessary to await his return before we could get transport. No villager in Siam dared move hand or foot without his chief's permission.

A Vagabond in Asia

The headman is an absolute tyrant, and it is even necessary to obtain leave from him before visiting another village. The little money that may come from outside sources goes to swell his hoard. When the headman arrived it was evening, and he told us that there were no boats to be had, but that we could get them at the next village. He drove us there in his bullock cart the next morning, a distance of some four or five miles. Again the headman was away, and another wearisome day of waiting ensued, but he returned in the evening, and promised to start us off in his boat at sunrise. In the morning he showed signs of repenting, but I had all my kit conveyed to the nearest boat, pushed him in and leapt in afterwards. It was a ramshackle barque, with barely an inch above the water-line. The current was very swift. After days of enforced loitering it was an exhilarating sensation to feel ourselves being swept down-

Off the Beaten Track

stream at a lively pace towards Kanburi. My twelve *ticals* had been reduced to six, and I was wondering what expedients would be necessary to take us to Bangkok. However, the fates were with us, for when my waterman had refused to start I had whipped out my Burmese passport in the most impressive manner I could, and pointing downstream ejaculated the single word "Kanburi," with a finality that persuaded him that we must be Government servants of some importance. Now there is a law in Siam to the effect that the headmen of all villages must convey travellers on Government service, free of charge, to the next. So it fell to us to travel under the protection of the white elephant. Travellers in Siam are so rare that the mistake was natural enough. Nor had I any qualms of conscience in the matter: for as every Siamese, with whom I had had any dealings, had cheated me, it is not sur-

A Vagabond in Asia

prising that with six *ticals* in my pocket to take me some 160 miles, I was glad to turn the tables so far as to be able to travel conveniently in my new capacity. Neither my bearer nor myself knew a word of the language ; it only lay with us to play our parts well.

After five or six miles, which we covered in little more than an hour, we came to a large fishing-village, where we stopped at the house of a one-eyed Chinaman, who was deputed to convey us to the next stage. His house, like nearly all houses in Siam that are not floating houseboats, was built on piles overlooking the river. Our landing-stage was his verandah, where his picturesque little brats were throwing rice to the fish which literally choke these Siamese rivers. We were soon paddling leisurely downstream before a strong current, with John Chinaman seated in the bows, a monument of patient resignation, the pensive wisdom of all

Off the Beaten Track

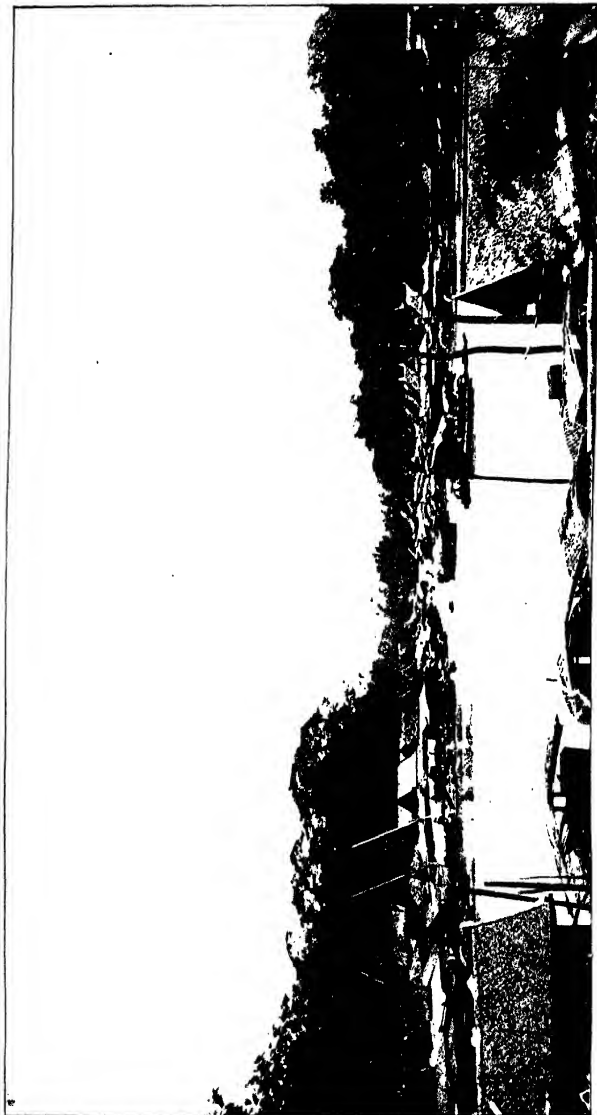
the East in his one Celestial eye. A couple of hours brought us to another village, half concealed in a creek on the left bank of the river. We thought John Chinaman must have found us out, but he departed silently as he had come, and left us cheered with the conviction that if we could deceive a one-eyed Celestial there was some hope of our reaching Bangkok without further mishap.

I have never anywhere seen such a wealth of bird and fish life as in the upper reaches of the May-nam-kway-naiu-ey. Fish are so plentiful that a child can catch them by the simplest devices, and all the fish-catching *genera* of birds, herons, king-fishers, adjutants, and pelicans swarm on the sands and stunted willows by the riverside. I saw five kinds of kingfishers, but duck, widgeon, teal, there are none. My boatmen persuaded me to shoot an adjutant; it was a crime I know, and I felt as guilty as the Ancient Mariner,

A Vagabond in Asia

but it meant two days' messing to them. The bird is so wise, so stately when at rest, five feet of dignity as he stands sentinel, motionless, watching the stream flow by, as patiently as Horace's rustic ; but when disturbed, so ridiculously awkward and unwieldy, as ungainly as a village child learning to walk on stilts ; and again, when his wings are once under way, behold a gallant argosy floated on a sea of fleecy cloud, yet when he anchors on a tree the illusion is lost, and there is left a shapeless bulk, for all the world like a white-washed beer-barrel, or a bolster dropped from a passing balloon.

The next village was approached by a dyke on the right bank of the river, the entrance of which was guarded by two huge folding doors of teak wood, riveted with iron nails. These gates used always to be closed at nightfall against the attack of robbers. Here we put in for a third trans-shipment, but



SIAMESE RIVER SCENE,

Photo by Messrs. Lenz, Bangkok.

Off the Beaten Track

it appeared that all the inhabitants of the village were away in the paddy fields and I made my unfortunate boatmen take me to the next stage five miles down stream. Here also the villagers could not or would not help us, but I was determined not to be stranded again, so there was no alternative but to make my boatmen take me all the way to Kanburi. They expostulated, but I insisted, and when we arrived there late in the evening, they seemed quite cheerful and pleased when I gave them my last remaining *ticals*. No doubt the unnecessary gratuity is unheard of in Siam. It must have taken the poor fellows several days to get back, as in places the current is tremendously strong.

As we approached Kanburi the monotony of the landscape was broken by precipitous wooded crags that rose abruptly from the river-side. For some miles before Kanburi the continuity of

A Vagabond in Asia

the villages on the bank was unbroken. It was evident that we were approaching a populous and important centre. At last, when darkness had obscured the view entirely, the din and clamour on the bank increases, and we are swept on by the stream into what appears a large, open lake islanded with house-boats, and illumined with a thousand twinkling lights. The clang of music and the cadence of children's voices is carried over the water and merged in the soft ripple of the tide against our boat. Behold the floating city of Kanburi, and the junction of the May-nam-kway-naiu-ey and the May-nam-see-sa-wat. Moreover it is Christmas Eve.

VI

BANGKOK

Kanburi was my first introduction to the Far East. It was a typical Siamese town; all of it that was not actually floating or suspended over the water on piles, was contained in one long straggling street and the alleys that intersected it, and ran down to the water's edge, no broader than Yarmouth Rows. . The other side of the street was flanked by the extensive compound of the ancient fort, now fallen into decay. The walls were of great height, with bastions at the corners and embrasures in the parapet for cannon. The gates were of massive teakwood, thickly studded with large iron nails,

A Vagabond in Asia

and topped with curious old penthouses and picturesque turrets. The cannons had been mostly removed: those that were left were overgrown with rank vegetation, and in some of them birds had built their nests. I saw afterwards just such other forts at Siamrep and Battambang in the ancient provinces of Cambodia.

My boatmen took me to the house of the post-master, who had a smattering of French and English. It was quite late at night when we climbed up the perpendicular staircase from the river and deposited my kit in his garden. My prospective host was playing a species of accordion. The cadence was most melodious. His costume was elegant to a degree; all that I can remember of his upper person was a picturesque sombrero hat; but his lower limbs I shall never forget. They were clad in faultless knee breeches, lavender silk stockings and boots. He was a hand-

Off the Beaten Track

some youth with Italian features and complexion. He continued playing, quite unconscious of my presence in the garden, and for some time I was loath to disturb the music. When at last I obtruded my shadow in his doorway, he came and addressed me without surprise in English.

On Christmas morning I sauntered out with my host to call upon the Assistant-Governor. The Governor himself was in Bangkok attendant upon the festivities that marked the King's return from Europe. The object of my visit was to obtain change for some of my Indian rupees; in this I was unexpectedly successful, and all further cause of anxiety for my journey was removed. The Assistant-Governor was a dignified little man with a kindly manner. There was nothing pretentious about his house, save that it was approached by the customary archway that denotes rank. Our next care was to provide a Christmas

A Vagabond in Asia

dinner worthy of the occasion. For more than a week Shafraz had served me with nothing but tasteless boiled doves, cabin biscuits, and the very occasional luxury of dry corned beef. Fat ducks and geese were running about the streets in insolent security, for their lives were sacred in this pure shrine of Buddhism. Money could not buy them. The Chinese shops that lined the chief streets offered nothing more inviting than pork—alas! my servant was a Mahommedan—and rotten duck's eggs. These when they have attained a high state of putrescence are considered appetising by the Celestial. However the eloquence of the post-master, my host, persuaded a Chinaman to slay for me a very lean chicken: fish were to hand, and Shafraz provided a Christmas dinner which would have been excellent, had he not run out of *ghee*, and saturated everything with a fetid, evil-smelling native oil that pervaded my nostrils and haunted

Off the Beaten Track

my sleep for weeks. The post-master was my guest, and it was evident that he enjoyed himself immensely.

I managed to secure a *sampan* and two rowers to take me on to Ratburi, a journey of two days. Of course I was told that there were no boats to be had, though it might be possible to secure one within a few days; yet the river was choked with *sampans*, and the streets with idle men. "Never do to-day what you can put off till to-morrow," is a motto of the Siamese. "Who knows but the world may end to-night?" is another. The word "transport" conjures up a nightmare of maladies to the traveller in Siam. It is a greater terror to pilgrims in the land of the white elephant than malaria itself; men have died of "transport" before now. There was the hapless surveyor in Siamese Government employ on the Burmo-Siamese frontier whose elephants tarried on the way. There were the Australian prospectors at Chantaboun who became rooted like mush-

A Vagabond in Asia

rooms in a malarious swamp, but that is a tedious tale and harsh to hear. I often had cause to envy my American precursor and his paper suit.

A glance at the map will show that almost the entire population of Siam exists in villages scattered along the river banks. Their houses for the most part are built on floating rafts, or supported on piles over the water's edge. The people are amphibious, hence their only virtue, cleanliness. There are no roads in the country outside Bangkok, and the pilgrim is fortunate who can win his destination through the great waterways, the main arteries of commerce. The Meping river between Kanburi and Ratburi is, like all other Siamese rivers I have seen, monotonous and uninteresting; the banks offer a long succession of betel-nut and cocoanut palm, paddy-fields, bamboo, sugarcane and tobacco: such is the scenery of the Meping, the Menam, the Tachin, and the Mekong; the difference is only in size.

Off the Beaten Track

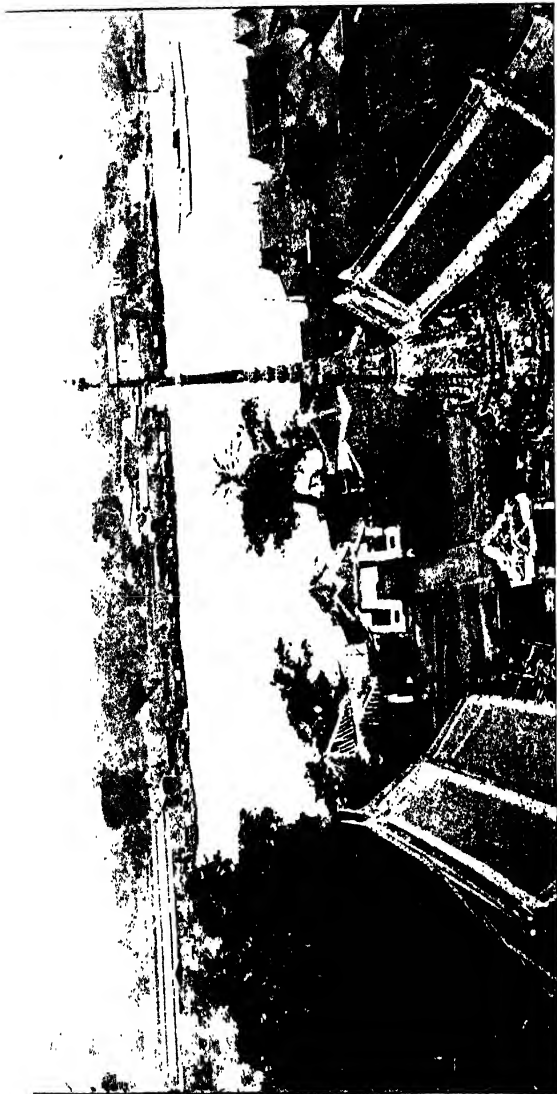
Two days brought us to Ratburi. Replace the ancient fort by the Governor's bran-new yellow and blue house, and Ratburi is a repetition of Kanburi. There is the same Far East smell—it is a scent that is quite different from that of the Chinese quarters of Western towns, the same succession of long low Chinese shops with their display of pork, rotten duck's eggs, and cheap European piece-goods; the same gaudy Chinese doorways with their lucky red peach-paper; the same trumpery, tinselled joss-house, and the same spacious gambling hall. This is bigger than the joss-house, by the way, and frequented by its devotees at all hours of the day. The greatest source of revenue in Siam is derived from the licenses of the gambling houses. The Governor of Ratburi was away in Bangkok, as were all loyal governors, to welcome his travelled King. From what I heard of the estimable gentleman, Ratburi was not the loser, nor likely to be plunged into grief at his

A Vagabond in Asia

absence. At the time of my visit the town was busy in organising theatricals and pageants to signalise the King's return. The Ratburians had only just recovered from similar dissipations consequent upon the installation of lamps in their streets, a measure that in its laudable desire of putting down theft must have affected the whole of the population in exact proportion to their riches, for it would be as unpopular with those who had nothing to lose as it was popular with those who had everything. At Ratburi I was a guest under the hospitable roof of an American missionary, the first white face I had seen since leaving Tavoy.

During a residence of many years at Ratburi, my host remembered but three white men who had crossed overland between Bangkok and Tavoy. None of them had any money, so it is not surprising that the natives of the Hinterland look upon white men with suspicion.

Early on the morning after my arrival I



THE MENAM RIVER, BANGKOK.

Photo by Messrs. Lenz, Bangkok.

Off the Beaten Track

started in a little steam-launch for Bangkok. Jammed in between natives and Chinamen, stifled by the heat, overpowered by noisy, fetid smells, and distracted by the discordant siren at my very ears, and all the jarring Siamese noises, I became initiated into a new species of discomfort, which, while it lasted, was infinitely more unpleasant than any roughing it in wild places. It was a long day's journey to Bangkok, and we stopped at every wayside village to pick up some tonsured, yellow-robed priest, or pensive Chinaman, or young Siamese blood in lavender stockings, knee-breeches, bowler, or sombrero, attracted by the coming festivities to town. We passed from the Meiklong by a canal in the left bank which took us into the Tachin, whence by another canal we reached the Menam, a little above Bangkok. It was dark when the launch deposited Shafraz and myself on the hotel landing-stage, and I was so irredeemably disreputable that I had some misgivings as to

A Vagabond in Asia

my reception. But I was permitted to taste the joys of civilisation, and unless one has spent days in a malarious Siamese jungle amongst imbecile savages, without visible means of transport, one cannot duly appreciate the delights of a soft bed, a European *menu*, and the contact with one's own fellow-creatures. -

The next day Shafraz and I were taken from the hotel in a gondola to the most hospitable house in Bangkok, where I remained a guest a fortnight. I will not dwell on picturesque Bangkok, nor weary my readers with a description of its wats and palaces. Neither will I call Bangkok the Venice of the East, nor repeat that Menam means Mighty Mother of Waters. All these things have been written in the chronicles of previous travellers. But I should like to draw attention to the position of Europeans in Bangkok, a matter which is not perfectly understood by those whose lives have not included a blissful residence in that enlightened city. Coming from

Off the Beaten Track

India or Burma one is at once struck by the total want of respect shown to the white skin ; of course one expects this to a certain degree in the Far East, but one is not prepared for the undisguised contempt of the veneered savage. The white man is no more respected in Siam than the yellow man is in England. What is the cause ? Firstly and obviously that the Siamese have never been bent to European methods, or experienced any form of European control : secondly, that when Siam was first discovered as a field for exploitation Bangkok became a prey to an army of adventurers, swindlers, and renegade missionaries of the worst type ; thirdly, that Europe, more especially Great Britain, has been so ill-represented for many years by its ministers and consuls in Bangkok that the Siamese, whatever their ideas of European integrity, have but little respect for European intellect.

Then as regards Great Britain and France. At home we cherish the idea

A Vagabond in Asia

that British influence is paramount in Bangkok ; but in the face of such revelations as the recent Korat railway scandal, and the expulsion from Bangkok of Mr. Lillie, the editor of the *Siam Free Press*, we must acknowledge that our prestige has been sadly tarnished of late. No doubt this is in great part due to the moral effect of Lord Salisbury's conciliatory policy in China. We have held and ought to hold the trump card in Siam. To recognise how the cards are dealt, we must glance at the present position of Siam. France is extending her sphere of influence in the east, in the west Great Britain remains impassive. The conflicting interests of the two Powers have wedged Siam compactly into a restricted area between. By the convention of 1896, France and Great Britain mutually guaranteed her security and independence within the limits of this zone. A glance at the map will show that it is not a wide one, but it represents

Off the Beaten Track

the most fertile country in Siam, covering as it does the watersheds of the Menam, the Meiklong, and their tributaries. Beyond this territory the sovereignty of King Chulalongkorn extends nominally as far east as the Mekong, subject to limitations, but within it any act of encroachment or aggression by the one Power will be regarded as a declaration of hostility by the other. So Siam affords us a lesson in miniature of how more than one dynasty, barbaric and otherwise, is being upheld to-day through the jealous medium of civilised Powers. Siam is in a securer position now than she was in 1893; her weakness has proved her strength. But it is not to be expected that this even pressure on both sides will continue to secure her equilibrium for ever. Relations between France and Siam are as strained as they can be. France has long been nibbling at territory in the east, and exasperating the Foreign Office in Bangkok by her

A Vagabond in Asia

wholesale absorption of Siamese subjects as French *protégés*. Complications must arise, and Siam has always looked upon Great Britain as her natural protector. All her sympathies have been British. The King and several of the Princes were educated in England, the Crown Prince is there now; an educational system has been adopted in Siam on English lines, and the King lately opened a school for the sons of the princes under an able English staff, with the tutor of the late Crown Prince at the head. Great Britain has supplied Siam with advisers and civil servants from the Indian Government; commercial enterprise in the country is almost entirely in British and German hands; and English is spoken at the Court in Bangkok to the exclusion of other European languages. In a word we ought to hold the political and commercial field in Siam. French influence is on the wane, and French commerce is non-existent, and there has

Off the Beaten Track

long been a feeling that, when the demands of the French Colonial party become too excessive, King Chulalongkorn will apply, vainly no doubt, for the British protectorate. Yet with such cards in their hands our Foreign Office at home and their representatives in Bangkok have played their game so badly that in the case of the Korat Railway the interests of a large British firm, like Jardine Matheson, have been shelved by German intrigue, and in the March of last year Mr. Lillie, a British subject, was left to the jurisdiction of the Siamese Court, and expelled from the country, without protest from the British Consular agents in Bangkok. We have no sympathy with Mr. Lillie's editing of the *Siam Free Press*, which appears to us worthy of all condemnation, yet he is a British subject, and the non-intervention of the Foreign Office in his behalf must have dealt a blow to British prestige in Siam.

A Vagabond in Asia

When I arrived in Bangkok the King had lately returned from Europe, and the city was alive with rumours of his impressions of the different European Powers. No doubt much of this, if not all, was mere idle gossip, without the slightest foundation, but the contrast between his reception in England and his reception by the German Emperor was not without its significance. In England His Majesty was treated with a most perfect courtesy, and in a manner exactly befitting his rank. The royal hospitality extended to an invitation to lunch at Windsor Castle. We all know how the Kaiser's eyes were strained from the quay to catch a glimpse of his dear Chulalongkorn, the warm hand-clasp and the subsequent fêting. How touching it all was, and how the hearts of the two progressive monarchs must have beat! No doubt Chulalongkorn has tender memories of that day. It is significant, too, that the last of the King's sons

Off the Beaten Track

destined for a European education has been despatched to Russia. But is this the history of King Chulalongkorn and his court, or the story of a mere vagabond on tramp, and his sufferings and respites in a savage land?

VII

IN THE SPHERE OF FRENCH INFLUENCE.

After ten days spent in Bangkok I began to bestir myself to obtain passports from the French Consulate and the Siamese Foreign Office in order to continue my journey farther east. The European mind cannot grasp how hopeless it is to get the Foreign Office to do anything at any time, much more so in the midst of such festivities as signalled the King's return. One has often to wait weeks even, though the matter in hand be merely the signature to a traveller's passport. I was fortunate in obtaining an introduction to Prince Damrong, the Minister of the Interior, who is well known for his courtesy, business-

Off the Beaten Track

like habits, and genuineness, in a country where these qualities are at a discount. Prince Damrong very kindly gave me a personal letter of introduction to the Governors of the provinces and towns through which I would have to pass *en route* for Angkor Wat and the Great Lake of Cambodia. This letter I found invaluable in spite of the sneers of anti-Siamese scoffers, who would have it that the authority of the court at Bangkok was limited to a radius of some fifteen miles outside that city. The European residents in Bangkok, though duly impressed with the immensity of Siamese incompetence, are really quite ignorant of Siam and the Siamese. Bangkok is not Siam, and the people of Bangkok are not the people of Siam. To see the real Siam one must enter or depart by the back door, not by the colony of Europeans, Chinamen and Malays on the Menam bank.

Europeans in Bangkok almost to a

A Vagabond in Asia

man express an intense dislike to the place, and I can imagine that more than a fortnight of it must be extremely monotonous. It is filthy and unhealthy, and after the first glamour of its novelty has passed away, uninteresting. Cholera is rampant and claims its yearly share of victims. There is no sport worth mentioning, save three weeks of snipe shooting. The place does not even run to a bobbery pack, and I did not see a decent horse all the while I was there. There is an English club which begins to fill at about five in the evening, when its members seek relaxation in billiards and whist with intermittent "stingers." There are also occasional clay pigeon shooting competitions and lawn tennis tournaments, which are somewhat prolonged as there is only one court. The Germans too have their club, but life with them does not seem to be any more thrilling. Owing to the scarcity of

* Pegs.

Off the Beaten Track

hostesses society is more or less stagnant. But the most hopeless side to life in Bangkok is that there is no escape from it. There are no asylums, like our Indian hill stations, where one can retreat for a week's holiday or recoup after an attack of illness. The nearest sanatorium is in Java. One is tied down to the wretched place without hope of change until one's time of leave is due, when two months out of a paltry six are taken up with the voyage to and from home. No wonder the death-rate among Europeans is high. For myself, amidst the most hospitable surroundings, time passed very pleasantly in Bangkok. I found it very delightful to explore the network of *klongs*, or canals, that intersect the town on the right bank of the river, and spent many mornings amongst the antique *wats* and pagodas, and the crumbling palaces of the adherents of the late regency. Here is the old-world, picturesque Bangkok, a glimpse of the town as it used to be,

A Vagabond in Asia

before the *farang* came with his roads and his tramcars, his railways and electric lightings, which have disfigured the Bangkok of New Street and the Bangkok of the merchants and tradesmen — as unlovely and prosaic a quarter as you will find in the Far East. There is a unique charm in Bangkok Cis-Menam with its temples and its *prachydees*, and its glinting tiled roofs that have caught some of the golden glory of the ripe harvest field.

In other respects my visit was well timed, as I was able to attend a reception given to the King by the Siamese Navy on board the cruiser-yacht *Maha Chakri*, in which he had just returned from Europe. The Queen looked very charming in her Siamese knickerbockers and stockings and rich European evening bodice. The combination was picturesque enough to win over the most hardened Puritan to the introduction of divided skirts. The King's bodyguard of Blue Jackets might have been lent by the Gaiety or Savoy



A CORNER OF OLD BANGKOK.

Photo by Messrs. Lenz. Bangkok.

Off the Beaten Track

for the occasion, but that may be a suggestion born of prejudice. Certainly they appeared more operatic than military. The Siamese, by the way, are a nation of theatre-goers. One comes across open air plays staged at the corner of every street. These are prolonged sometimes for three or four days, and watched by a rapt audience, who never seem to tire of the endless monotony of the posturings, and are quite oblivious of the passing distractions of the road.

After a short visit to Ayuthia, the ancient capital of Siam, I obtained my passes from the French Consulate and the letter from Prince Damrong, and started off on my travels again for Siem Rep and Angkor Wat. In the unlikely event of business or pleasure taking any resident in Bangkok to Siem Rep, he would take the Messageries steamer to Saigon—that is if he had any regard for comfort at all—at a season in the year when the French

A Vagabond in Asia

launches were running up the Tali Sap Lake from Pnom Penh in Cambodia. There are two other routes, one by the Klon Sansep and Bang-Phra-Kong river to Pachim, and thence by bullock-cart,—a tedious journey of some ten days over a flat and uninteresting country; the other by steamer to Chantaboun and over the Kow Sabup range to Phairin, which is five or six days by bullock cart from Battambang, whence Siem Rep can be reached by a boat in two days. There is very little difference between the two routes in point of time, and there is a considerable chance of being “hung up” for transport either way; but that is a difficulty which presents itself anywhere in Siam ten miles outside Bangkok. I chose to go by Chantaboun, the more interesting of the two, as it includes “the port of Chantaboun” itself and the sapphire and ruby mines in the neighbourhood of Phairin, and takes

Off the Beaten Track

one over a hilly tract of country for the first part of the journey. The Pachim route, on the other hand, to counteract the depressing prospect of ten days by bullock cart over paddy land and low-lying jungle scrub, offered one consolation only, and that of a sentimental nature. By avoiding the twelve hours' sea voyage between the Menam mouth and Chantaboun I would have crossed the peninsula overland from Tavoy to Saigon, the breadth of Tenasserim, Siam, Cambodia and Cochin-China. Two Siamese steamers ply between Bangkok and Chantaboun, and the s.s. *Dhonai* of the Messageries calls there once a fortnight going to and from Saigon. As may be imagined, the Siamese vessels are not conspicuous for their cleanliness or their comfort, or their punctuality, or the capacity of their engineers, or anything that is soothing to European instincts—in fact there is no accommodation for the

A Vagabond in Asia

European at all: he pays the same fare as John Chinaman, and travels deck with him, and has the opportunity of observing as heterogeneous a collection of humanity as can be found out east. I had for companions on the hurricane deck, a Levantine Greek, a Frenchman, a Malay or two, several Chinamen and Siamese, a Burman, a Manilla half-caste, a Hindu from Calcutta and a Mussulman from Madras, and several adventurers of an indistinct breed, who had interests in the ruby and sapphire mines in the neighbourhood of Chantaboun.

The voyage from the Menam mouth only lasts a few hours, and the vessel is scarcely ever out of sight of land. The sea is studded with islands, green and wooded to the water's edge, as in the Mergui Archipelago. They yield a large supply of sea swallow's nests, which annually find their way to the tables of Chinese mandarins. Vessels

Off the Beaten Track

are not able to sail up the Chantaboun creek. Our steamer was met by unwieldy cargo boats rowed in the sampan fashion, which took several hours making way against wind and tide, before we reached our destination. Chantaboun is a small fishing town, of some 5,000 inhabitants. It is now occupied by the French, and has been spoken of in Parliamentary debates as "the second largest sea-port in Siam." France first stationed a garrison there during the disturbances of 1893, as a guarantee of Siam's observance of the clause of the treaty that demanded her evacuation of the left bank of the Mekong. She still retains the position, the time-limit of her occupation being worded in the most elastic and in the vaguest possible terms. Moreover, she has extended her sphere of influence in Siamese territory as far west as the provinces of Battambang and Siem Rep; this, no doubt, with a view to future

A Vagabond in Asia

complications with the Siamese Government that may serve her ends. What pretext had she for this movement? for no self-respecting Power will move her frontier line or extend her influence nowadays without some valid reason, be it only the gore of a bandit-slain missionary, and France was ready with her excuse. Historical inquiries revealed to her that these provinces were at one time subject to Cambodia, and we are asked to believe that it is owing to this incident in Indo-Chinese history that the garrison has been retained at Chantaboun, and a Commissioner appointed at Battambang to look after the interests of French subjects. But Lord Dufferin assured us in his speech at the Burma Dinner, which was held on the 16th of August last year, that "the rights of sovereignty of Siam up to the right bank of the Mekong and over the provinces of Battambang and Angkor still remained intact, and absolutely

Off the Beaten Track

secure by the treaty, so far as the loyal observance of any treaty was a security in these days when the long spoon played such a considerable part at the diplomatic banquet." The French subjects in Siam are a class of people that have been the cause of endless friction and strife between the Quai d'Orsay and the Foreign Office in Bangkok. Those who sympathise with Siamese interests have found reason for alarm lately in the excessive proportion of native protégés both in the capital and in the provinces.

It appears that registrations have been distributed broadcast, without any very searching inquiries as to the merits and antecedents of the recipients; many of whom seem to regard the shelter of the French wing as an asylum of independence and a retreat from the consequences of their misdeeds past and future. When King Chulalongkorn visited Paris last year it appears that

A Vagabond in Asia

the French Government extracted a promise from him to release all prisoners under French protection at Siam. This the Siamese Foreign Office has resolutely refused to do, and Siamese diplomacy has recognised that such a concession would be the last blow to Siam as an independent country. Indeed this wholesale absorption of Siamese subjects by a foreign power has a far wider significance than at first appears. If the system of indiscriminate registration is to continue, the day is not far distant when France will be able to point to thousands of misguided and misgoverned subjects in Siam, whose condition will be a crying reproach to a policy of prolonged hesitancy and inactivity. Then the shadow of the French tricolour will darken the valley of the Menam. France will feel a moral obligation to fulfil the ends of justice, to cover with her wings a people she has undertaken to protect. It will be a sad day for King Chulalong-

Off the Beaten Track

korn and his court. But perhaps it won't matter much, as France will only *feel* the obligation.

To return to Chantaboun. The French have erected a fort on the right bank of the river commanding Paknam, or the river's mouth. It is within a stone's throw of the Summer Palace, but needless to say King Chulalongkorn has not visited this part of his dominions since the events of 1893. In Chantaboun itself the French have constructed another fort in the site of the old Siamese barracks. It occupies an elevated situation, and does not command the river. From a sanitary point of view, however, it is the best site that could be chosen, as it is above the malarial level.

The phrases one hears most often in Siam are *may di*, *may ru*, *may nee*, which have their equivalents in pidgeon English, "no can do," "no savvy," "no have got." That is a *repertoire* that will carry you a long way in Siam. I had had my

A Vagabond in Asia

own experience of transport on the Burmese frontier, where I had to carry my portmanteau and rifle twenty miles through an almost trackless jungle. They were not pleasant, but some stories I heard at Chantaboun made them shrink to insignificance. But on the far side of Bangkok I found Prince Damrong's letter of wonderful assistance. However slight the practical authority of Government may be in the provinces, the signature of a prince of the royal blood seems to command respect everywhere. To obtain transport I paid a visit to the governor, a jolly old fellow, who spoke English fluently and prattled of the days when he was the guest of the Siamese legation in London. It was curious to sit with this half-naked and wholly barbarous-looking figure in his primitive surroundings, and listen to his reminiscences of the London Music Halls of the early eighties. The "Oxford" and the underground railway

Off the Beaten Track

seem to have impressed him more than anything else. He spoke too of the "Empire" of whose allurements he had heard from younger men—but not regretfully: he had no wish to return. His day was passed, he said. Leave London to the younger dogs. He invited me to breakfast *à la Siamoise*, apologising courteously for being unable to provide a European fare, though the day had been when he could draw a cork and carve a turkey with the best of them. Elephants were not to be had when I was in Chantaboun, and I was fortunate in securing some Laos coolies the second day after my arrival, to take me on to Phairin. The weights these fellows carried was astonishing, and their behaviour different from that of any coolies I have met before: they actually scrambled for my kit, as though each were determined to carry the heaviest load. Such anxiety to seize upon my belongings was suspicious, to say the

A Vagabond in Asia

least of it, and I was fully prepared for some unexpected development. It appeared afterwards that there was a fixed rate per pound for coolie hire, and on arrival at Phairin, four days after, my kit was weighed and the coolies were paid at the rate of something over two rupees a day. The prices seem exorbitant, but the reason of these high rates is twofold, first that Phairin with its gambling houses is a miniature Klondike, secondly that, without exception, Phairin is the unhealthiest place in Siam, probably in all Asia. Servants as a rule run away rather than follow their masters there. Even the Laos show a wholesome dread of the place.

Phairin is the most deadly malarious place in Siam. It can boast a funeral nearly every day. When the sapphire mines were opened ten years ago, the death-rate amongst the Burmese immigrants was 75 per cent. In those days there were no priests and no *wat*

Off the Beaten Track

at Phairin, and the pious miners used to send their dead to Bangkok to ensure for them the proper funeral ceremonies. It was a favourite pastime of the Siamese skipper of one of the vessels running between Bangkok and Chantaboun to ask his Burmese passengers whither they were bound; and when they answered "to the sapphire mines," he would wag his head sagely, and say, "Friend, you will find it more expensive coming back." It cost five rupees for the live man to ship from Bangkok to Chantaboun, and ten for the corpse to return. I found one European at Phairin, and his welcome was the welcome of men who live among the dead to a live soul. The four days I spent under his roof were among the pleasantest of my expedition, though I felt half stifled and terribly relaxed in the moist depressing atmosphere. The fact that it was the healthiest time of the year did not pre-

A Vagabond in Asia

vent me from getting malaria thoroughly into my system. No Europeans have been able to stand the climate. The doctors who were sent out by the Borneo Company were the first to succumb. My host had just returned from a visit to British Columbia for his health's sake. He was a man of great strength and a robust constitution, though it was easy to see the strain was telling on him; it was a relief to hear that he had been removed to a healthier district shortly after my visit. The late Siamese Governor of the district used to live at Muong Thanat and paid but one hurried visit to Phairin. He was heard to say on the day of his arrival that he had always avoided the place as he was desperately afraid of fever. Five days afterwards, on his arrival at Battambang he died of malaria contracted at Phairin. The present Commissioner resides at some three day's distance, and has only once been

Off the Beaten Track

near Phairin. He stayed exactly two days. The mines are mostly leased to Burmans. The coolies are Laos. But it is significant that though the district is supposed to be within the sphere of French influence, yet all the wealth that accrues to Europeans from the ruby and sapphire mines is absorbed by British enterprise.

It is not an uncommon sight in Phairin and the neighbouring village of Bau Dineo to see a file of some twenty Laos coolies, yoked with kerosine tins packed with silver, the price of the rubies and sapphires that are sold in the Calcutta market; their only escort two unmartial-looking Burmans armed with antiquated blunderbusses. Theft is unheard of at Phairin; like many other mining centres it is a law-abiding place in a lawless country. The Siamese have very little stake there.

VIII

AN OLD CAMBODIAN PROVINCE

The journey from Chantaboun to Phairin had been over a hilly country through the Kow Sabap range. But striking north to Battambang, the country becomes flat, sterile, and monotonous. One cannot help wondering what the French would make of such a district, when their colonisation of the rich Mekong Valley is only carried on at such an enormous annual deficit. I had sent my kit on with Shafraz, by bullock cart, while I was enjoying the society of my host at Phairin. It is reckoned five days by bullock cart from Phairin to Battambang, and two by pony. So I gave Shafraz four days'

Off the Beaten Track

start, and followed in pursuit on a game little Siamese tat. The Siamese ride with loose girths and hard saddles; in consequence, every pony in the country that is ridden has a sore back. The first time my saddle came off (it was impossible to girth it up tight), a terrible sore was revealed in the poor beast's back, as well as a girth gall. In Battambang, where the sporting governor combines the pleasures of the hunting field and the *battue*—riding after deer and shooting them—many of his Cambodian friends take part in the chase, riding bare back. It speaks for the hardness of the Cambodian anatomy, that even on these conditions it is the pony that generally suffers. Of course I could not reach Battambang in the time I had proposed, so there was nothing for it but to wait for my syce and walk the whole way. However it only took me two days and an hour to do the sixty miles. The journey included a stretch of nearly

A Vagabond in Asia

forty miles of quite uninhabited country, devoid of water, where I had to spend one night. I found a muddy puddle for the pony, but when my drinking supply was finished I had nothing left but neat whisky. This was on January 22nd, the day of the eclipse of the sun, which must have been partially visible from Battambang; but the sky was a little clouded and I saw no signs of it.

Battambang, a long straggling town, stretching for a mile or more on each bank of the river, is the capital of a semi-independent province of the same name. A century and a half ago the province was wrested from Cambodia by the Siamese; since when it has made repeated efforts to regain its independence. Since 1893 the French have spoken of it as within their sphere of influence. But there are no troops in Battambang nor any apparent "influence," French or Siamese, save that of the Governor, a peculiarly independent re-



SIAMESE GIRL.

Photo by Messrs. Lenz, Bangkok

Off the Beaten Track

presentative of the Bangkok Government. The Governor is a young man, remarkable for his anti-European views ; his dislike for the French and English amounting almost to a mania. Indeed his feelings are so strong on the subject that the approach of a European traveller to Battambang is always the signal of his hurried departure into the jungle on a hunting expedition. He could not devise a more effective method of annoying the unlucky visitor ; for in Siam, and more especially in Battambang, it is next to impossible to obtain transport or any assistance whatever, without the express order of the Governor. Being forewarned, I was not at all surprised to find that the Governor had lately left his palace, and was camping in the jungle at a day's distance from the town. I believe he is a keen sportsman ; his yearly bag is certainly a large one, and his province a splendid field for his energies. During the rains,

A Vagabond in Asia

when the great Tali Sap is flooded, the fallow deer are driven in herds to the interior. Then is the time for sport. The break-neck chase over broken ground on quick little Siamese ponies, the myriad mishaps of the hunting field, the triumphant quartering of the antlered prize must be very delightful. I should like to number the Governor of Battambang among my friends. After all, his wholesome hatred of his white neighbours, who are encroaching upon his dominions and threatening his independence, is natural enough, and even laudable. He is a good hater; and this directness and outspokenness of his, coupled with his genuine love of sport and outdoor life in a country where, these qualities are phenomenal, make him contrast favourably with the effeminate intriguers of the capital. But the possession of these un-Siamese virtues does not imply the absence of the more characteristic Siamese faults—injustice.

Off the Beaten Track

and oppression. I saw the wretched file of chained prisoners issuing from the gates of the old fort for their day's bondage in the fields. What had these men done that their condition was worse than slavery? I learnt the history of but one. It was a pitiful story.

Seng Pa, a peaceful Laos, was driving his rice cart from Battambang to Phairin. He had unyoked his bullocks and was preparing his midday meal. His servants were cooking their rice beside the cart at a distance. Suddenly, and without warning or provocation, there appeared from nowhere MOUNG KYAN, a notoriously violent and demented Burman of the mines, who approached Seng Pa from behind, and dealt him three crushing blows on the head, breaking in his skull. The terrified servants ran to BAW DINEO, a day's journey, and told the story to TIT ON the brother of Seng Pa. Tit On repeated the facts to the *Kam*

A Vagabond in Asia

Nai, or headman of the village, and obtained the customary warrant for the arrest of the murderer alive or dead. Whereupon he set out with two friends to avenge his brother. He was directed to the house where MOUNG KYAN had been seen last. The maniac was ready for him, drew his *dah*, and took up his position at the top of the steps, but when he saw Tit On's gun, he lifted up his arms and rushed at him. Tit On fired twice. At the second shot MOUNG KYAN fell in a heap. Tit On returned to the mines, where he was arrested by the *Kam Nai* who had issued the warrant, and forwarded in chains to the Governor of Battambang as a dacoit. The unfortunate man was there at the time of my visit some months after the events recorded. No doubt it was the clank of his irons that I heard as I lay comfortably in bed in the early morning. No steps

Off the Beaten Track

had been taken to enquire into his case. In all probability he is still in chains.

So much for Siamese justice. A word as to Siamese oppression. The Governors and headmen of the remoter districts are small despots, little influenced by the Government in Bangkok; they recognise no law but their own needs, and exercise no justice but to serve their own ends. If a thief is caught red-handed, he is put into chains; but even crime is made a source of income, as a prisoner is released on receipt of a sufficient ransom from a relative. In a country of thieves the biggest thief will be the man with the largest opportunities. In Siam everything finds its way into the rapacious maw of the governor: he is generally the greatest scoundrel, his servants the most licensed pilferers in the district, and while he sets a premium on crime he discourages industry in every way.

A Vagabond in Asia

A little industry, a little enterprise, and a man is doomed. To become prosperous is to become the governor's prey, a mark for his oppression. Nai Kok has done a sound deal in hides, he has sold his paddy further afield than his neighbours and fetched a higher price. He invests in a few bullocks and builds a strong cart. These things are too good for a peasant ; they catch the governor's eye. The next day they are wanted at the palace. Nai Kok sits idly waiting as his neighbours bring in their paddy. The governor forgets to return the cart. Nai Kok dare not ask for it.

What wonder that the country stagnates under a system like that ! Until lately, though the peasants have been taxed almost to starvation on the veriest necessities of life, the cost of administration has more than equalled the revenue derived from taxes, which is absorbed by the petty officers who intervene. I say "until lately," because when I was in

Off the Beaten Track

Bangkok, a new system of taxation was being submitted to the Revenue by the financial advisers borrowed from the Government of India. But the Siamese though very fond of asking for advice, are very slow in following it. They cannot easily lend themselves to European views and methods. So many of their progressive projects have ended in smoke that one has come to look upon such schemes as visionary and Utopian. The King may have changed all that; I don't know. He came back from Europe full of good resolutions. Chulalongkorn is a great personality, no mere figurehead. Those who know him say that he has many kingly qualities, and a wonderful power of inspiring devotion in his subjects. He may be the most fitted to command of his race. Some say he is. But without support how can he steer the ship alone? As well put a Glasgow engineer in an old Greek galley and expect him to keep pace with a P. and O.

A Vagabond in Asia

The Governor of Battambang is of Cambodian origin, as are nearly all the inhabitants who are not Chinese. The French are justified in making capital of this, when they talk about their "sphere of influence." The Siamese element is very small. A few Indian traders have found their way to Battambang from Saigon. The Europeans are four: M. Roland, the French Commissioner, the most charming and hospitable of hosts, whose position in this very anti-European province must be far from enviable; Herr Russel, a courteous and travelled German, who has opened a store at which you can buy excellent vin ordinaire at half a dollar a bottle—his chief customers being the Chinese; and two French Roman Catholic missionaries, who have built a chapel and a school. It is in places like this that one meets the true Christian missionary. These men have really abandoned the world and their dear France for this evil, God-forsaken, mal-

Off the Beaten Track

arious country, knowing that they will never see their homes again, that their labour of conversion is well nigh hopeless; yet simply obeying the word of their Master, who told them to go forth to the ends of the earth and preach the gospel to all peoples. One feels that the virtue of such men is almost sufficient to atone for all the hypocrisy, the narrowness, the petty sectarian wranglings, the relapses into trade, and the comfortable living upon widow's mites, that have made the name of missionary a reproach in some quarters of the East.

The coinage of Battambang is curious. There are only two tokens in the currency, a silver bar of the value of 25 ticals, and the *pé*, a fragile little copper coin, the 176th part of a tical. It takes exactly 4,400 *pés* to make up the value of the silver bar, and there is no coin of a mean value. When the Governor is hard up he orders a new issue of *pés* to be stamped at the mint; but he has

A Vagabond in Asia

yielded so often to this temptation of creating an unlimited supply of ready money, that the *pié* has become almost valueless. At Battambang I came across the curious Laos *lat*, a picturesque, boat-shaped, copper coin, the exact model of a dug-out canoe. Each province has its own *lats*, which vary considerably in size and shape. I took away with me specimens from Chompasak, Son Ton, and Oobon. I was able, much to my surprise, to leave Battambang two days after my arrival. Prince Damrong's letter worked miracles. The Assistant-Governor procured me a comfortable sampan with four rowers to take me to Siem Rep, a three days' journey, wiring to the Governor there to send four bullock carts to meet us. At Battambang we fell in with the telegraph line from Bangkok to Siem Rep. My last impression of Battambang was of the silly water bullocks, who, wallowing in the muddy river-bed, watched my departure with that vacuous,

Off the Beaten Track

unintelligent stare, which betrays them as the most imbecile of beasts. On their backs squatted the Cambodian drivers, equally stolid, equally expressionless. The picture was symbolical. The same thought has been suggested to me by the crows in Calcutta, who in colour and character are symbolical of the natives of the place. Such scenes always remind me of *Sakya Muni*, and the theory of transmigration, which the holy man preached at the same time that Pythagoras was haranguing the citizens of Sybaris and Croton. He must have lifted up his eyes from the wickedness and corruption around him to see it reflected in the crows above. The East is replete with such symbolism.

Two days' hard rowing down a narrow, tortuous stream with muddy banks brought us to a north-westerly arm of the Tali Sap, the great inland sea of Cambodia. Here I enjoyed a delicious bath in blissful ignorance that the water

A Vagabond in Asia

was infested with crocodiles. The next afternoon we arrived at the narrow outlet of the Siem Rep River, and with difficulty got our sampan up the stream to where the bullock-carts were awaiting us four miles from the town itself. The Governor was away in Bangkok, but the Assistant Governor called on me at the *Sala*, or rest-house, which is provided for travellers, and very kindly lent me half a dozen bullock carts and a Cambodian servant to act as guide, interpreter, and commissariat agent. He was a comical fellow, and had a few words of French; but proved an unmitigated bore. Siem Rep is the cleanest, pleasantest, and most prosperous looking town that I visited in Siam. It is long and straggling, and situated on both banks of the little river that bears its name. The most distinctive feature of the place is the long perspective of water wheels which meets the eye as one looks up the river. Every house has its own wheel which revolves slowly with the

Off the Beaten Track

current, collecting the water in small bamboo cups which are emptied into a trough that carries it to the different houses by means of long wooden pipes. Women and children are fishing in the clear shallow water of the river, some with the orthodox rod and line, float and bent pin : others with traps and nets. The fish are so trusting in Siam ; it seems that no device is too simple for their undoing. They make a pretty picture these Cambodian fisherwomen, wading waist deep in the transparent water under the atap palms, in the early morning, at noon, and after twilight ; they are constant in my memory of the scene with the rude picturesque barges, the red and white praying boxes, and the slowly revolving water wheels. These are my most enduring memories of Siem Rep, though I did not take much note of them at the time ; for I was nearly at the end of my pilgrimage, the goal of all travellers in Indo-China,

A Vagabond in Asia

the ruined city of Angkor Thom, the
stateliest of temples, Angkor Wat.

IX

ANGKOR WAT AND THE GREAT LAKE

Some years ago I opened an old volume* of a French traveller, one Henri Mouhot. In it I found a description of Angkor Wat with the most astonishing picture. The description was so rhapsodical that I put it down to traveller's enthusiasm : the picture I attributed to the Gallic imagination. But on reading the book more carefully I found that Mouhot was not given to gush. My interests were aroused. I hunted up Angkor in the atlas and found that it bordered on the

* *Henri Mouhot* : Voyage dans les royaumes de Siam, de Cambodge, de Laos. Relations extraites du journal et de la correspondance de l'auteur, par Ferdinand de Lanoye. Paris : Hachette et Cie, 1872

A Vagabond in Asia

great Cambodian lake. Here was an ideal pilgrimage, well off the beaten track, with the most romantic goal. I was strangely fascinated too by the great Tali Sap lake, and imagined its silent waters to be the home and birthplace of the myriad flights of duck and geese that pass through Burma in the winter months, no one knows whence or whither. In this I was disappointed, for I saw but one solitary flight of teal, and my cartridge magazine was never lightened. However, my wildest dreams of Angkor Wat were more than realized. To parody our best-beloved poet—the fictions of Dieppe are the facts of Siem Rep; and, no doubt, the crimes of Clapham chaste at Battambang. I will not attempt to describe what I saw. It would not be believed :

Non mihi si centum deus ora sonantia linguis

Ingeniumque capax totumque Helicon a dedisset.

But I will turn again to my old friend Mouhot, to whom I owe the impulse of my pilgrimage. “A la vue de ce temple,

Off the Beaten Track

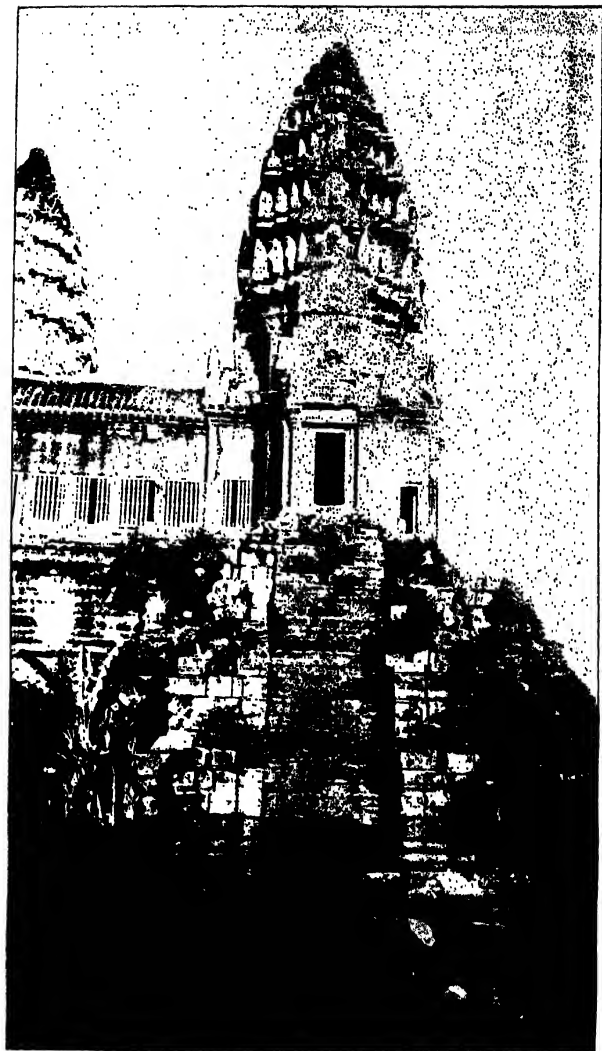
l'esprit se sent écrasé, l'imagination surpassée ; on regarde, on admire, et saisi de respect on reste silencieux : Car ou trouver des paroles pour louer une œuvre architecturale qui n' a peut être pas, qui n'a peut être jamais eu son equivalent sur le globe." Where find words indeed, and the picture, so far from being exaggerated, is even inadequate !

The first mention we find of Angkor Wat in European Literature is in a work published by one Ribadeneyra at Barcelona in 1601, which refers to the discovery of the ruins in 1564 by the Portugese and Spanish. In 1825 the French savant, Abel Remusat, published a translation of the journal of a Chinese ambassador who was sent on a mission to Cambodia in the thirteenth century. The work contained a description of Angkor Wat and Angkor Thôm, which coincides in every point with what we know of them to-day. Remusat's translation awoke the liveliest interest ; but it was not until thirty-five

A Vagabond in Asia

years later, when the French explorer, Mouhot, was sent out by an English society on a voyage of exploration to Indo China, that Europe became seriously interested in these astonishing relics of a lost civilization. Since Mouhot's expedition Angkor has been visited by many savants. Dr. Bastian, the famous German explorer, went there in 1865. Several missions were sent from Paris, notably that of Doudard de Lagrée in 1873, and that of Delaporte in 1874, who instituted the Musée Khmer, which is now in the Trocadero. Lastly, Fournereau, from whose sumptuous folios, published in Paris in 1890, we have learnt something of the origin and history of Angkor and the Khmers.

I have in my possession some photographs which have caught the sculptured grace of the pillars and corridors, revealed the exquisite beauty of the frescoes and friezes, and hinted at the massive solidity of the stonework. But it is impossible from any point to obtain a picture of the



ANGLE OF UPPER TERRACE,
ANGKOR WAT.

Photo by
F. Cégadeth, Saigon

Off the Beaten Track

scene that meets the eye as one looks down from the highest pagoda upon the terraces and colonnades beneath, the exquisitely fashioned shrines and image-houses, and across the great causeway to the three gates of the outer wall, the moat and bridge beyond, and the enveloping grandeur of the primeval forest which enshrines this enduring mystery, the monument of a great and civilised people whose very name has passed into the oblivion of centuries. I left Siem Rep for Angkor in the early morning. The first distant view of its pagodas and battlements in the dim light before sunrise suggested an old-world Dutch garden, with its fantastically clipt yews and mounting terraces. All was grey and indistinct. Then the road dipped into the forest again, and Angkor was lost for a mile or two. Then "a turn and we stand in the heart of things ; the woods are round us heaped and dim," and here before our eyes hundreds of miles from civilisation stands

A Vagabond in Asia

the stateliest temple in the world, buried in the mute solitude of the encircling jungle. At the moment of such revelations one wishes to be alone, or at least in quietness, and the sepulchral ejaculations of my Cambodian cicerone, who was tugging at my sleeve and pointing to the temple, were intensely annoying. They differed in nothing from the animal grunts of approval that issued from him as he smacked his lips over the ginger and claret that I gave him at dinner time to keep him quiet. He tried to follow me all over the Wat, in spite of constant dismissals, and I had to resort to personal violence to get rid of him. In the afternoon when he took me to explore the ruins of the ancient city of Angkor Thôm I had no choice but his company. His French vocabulary was of the scantiest; but he was very wearisome in his repetition of the few phrases that were known to him, each of which he accompanied with its proper Gallic gesticulation.

Off the Beaten Track

"Dormez ici, monsieur," "Mangez ici," "Voila Singe," "Voila Elephant." One might have expected to be spared the officiousness of a guide at Angkor of all places in the world, but my friend was more insistent than the cicerones of Rome and Naples.

All the lower Mekong Valley and the provinces of Battambang and Siem Rep are rich in monuments of this forgotten race, and the splendid ruins of Angkor Thôm, half smothered in the luxuriant tropical vegetation, are only less wonderful than those of Angkor Wat. In any city of the civilised world Angkor Wat would be the goal of pilgrims from the four continents, but situated as it is in a country where the highest flight of the architect's imagination never soars beyond a draughty cow-shed on stilts, its appearance is doubly imposing. Until quite lately nothing was known of Angkor: all was surmise. Various theories had been advanced as to the origin of the ruins.

A Vagabond in Asia

They were attributed to the Jews, the lost tribes of Israel, the Egyptians; but more often to the Khmers, who were the ancient inhabitants of Cambodia. Recent researches have proved this view to be correct. The inscriptions in the temple are in Sanskrit and Khmer, and the bass-reliefs of the outer corridors depict the Buddhist and Hindoo mythologies. Fournereau tells us that the great city of Angkor Thom was built in 447 B.C. by Préa-Thong, the reigning King of the Khmers. The great temple was not commenced until 57 A.D., and it was originally consecrated to the Hindoo deity, Timouti; but in 638, when the sacred Buddhist books were brought from Ceylon, and Buddhism was introduced into Cambodia, the temple was given over to the new cult. The modern Cambodians attribute Angkor to the gods; it must, at least, have been the work of giants. But though language is too arbitrary to

Off the Beaten Track

suggest the beauty and impressiveness of the temple, some idea of its vastness and solidity may be conveyed by the following measurements and statistics which I have taken from the work of a well-known traveller,* who made a careful survey of Angkor and its grounds.

The causeway which leads to the main entrance of the temple is 725 feet in length, and is paved with stones measuring four feet in length and two in breadth. The outer wall, about half a mile square, is built of sandstone, with gateways upon each side, which are handsomely carved with gods and dragons, arabesques and intricate scrolls. Upon the western side is the main gateway, and passing through this and up a causeway for a distance of a thousand feet, you arrive at the main entrance of the temple. The foundations of Angkor Wat are ten feet in height and massively built of volcanic rock. The

* Mr. Frank Vincent : *The Land of the White Elephant.*

A Vagabond in Asia

entire edifice, which is raised on three terraces, the one about thirty feet above the other, including the roof, is of stone, but without cement, and so closely-fitting are the joints as even now to be scarcely discernible. The quarry where the stone was hewn is thirty miles distant, and it is supposed that the transportation of the immense boulders could only have been effected by means of a water communication. The shape of the building is oblong, being 796 feet in length and 588 feet in width, while the highest central pagoda rises some 250 odd feet above the ground, and four others at the angles of the court are each about 150 feet in height. The gallery of sculpture, which forms the exterior of the temple, consists of over half a mile of continuous pictures, cut in basso-relievo upon sandstone slabs six feet in width, and represents subjects taken from the Hindoo mythology. Entire scenes from the *Ramayana* are pictured, one

Off the Beaten Track

of which occupies 240 feet of the wall. There are no key-stones used in the arches of the corridor. On the walls are sculptured the immense number of 100,000 separate figures.

The massiveness and grandeur of Angkor may be gathered from these statistics. The temple is miraculously intact with all its eighteen odd centuries.

I was determined to view Angkor aright, and accordingly visited it by moonlight. The sound of my footsteps in the deserted colonnades woke myriads of bats. The moonlight patterned on the floor, and silhouetting the palms outside, presented a scene of unearthly beauty. Sometimes the darkness of the corridors took shape and a shadowy priest appeared out of the silence; some little shrine before a Buddha was illumined by the tiny flicker of a joss stick, and the priest disappeared as silently as he had come. How many votaries of different creeds had passed

A Vagabond in Asia

that way. The immemorial columns were awake with their centuries of history :

The place is silent and aware

It has had its scenes, its joys and crimes ;

But that is its own affair.

The next day my devoted guide with his train of six trotting bullock carts, saw me to my boat on the Siem Rep river, eight miles from Angkor, four from Siem Rep. He was obsequious to the last, and carried away with him, besides the usual *douceur* some delicacies from my table (he was a thorough *gourmand*), and a testimonial in which I was able to speak for his attentiveness in the most unqualified terms. It appears that he is reserved by the Governor for the conduct of the French *fonctionnaires* who are frequent in their visits to Angkor in the rainy season, when a steam launch can run from Mytho to the mouth of the Siem Rep river. As a Commissariat Officer he was invaluable. His French testimonials

Off the Beaten Track

were most enthusiastic. Angkor, though well known to the French in Saigon, has very rarely been visited by Englishmen. I was surprised to find that Lord Curzon mentioned it in his *Far East*, with Babylon, Persepolis and the Taj Mahal, among the greatest triumphs of architecture in Asia. Most of his countrymen are unaware of its very existence.

January 30th saw us on the Tali Sap again, spinning down the lake in our great clumsy sampan, with its bamboo mast and torn flapping sail. Wind and tide were with us and we made good way, rowing and sailing at the same time. My men took their turns at the oars unceasingly day and night. The lake was alive with bird and fish life; every tree was bowed with its white and grey burden. Flamingoes, herons, paddy birds, and adjutants of all colours and varieties, but no duck or teal. Every now and then we passed some large fishing village with its looming

A Vagabond in Asia

barges. There is a very considerable fishing industry on the Tali Sap, where fish are salted and sent to all parts of the East. We kept coasting along the banks, always keeping one side of the lake in view. The Tali Sap is 90 miles in length in the dry season, and 120 in in the rains. It is 22 miles in breadth at its broadest part. There was a high water mark on the gloomy barrier of trees which fringe its borders, and seem to extend miles before they can strike their roots into dry land. On the afternoon of the third day after leaving Angkor Wat we arrived at Cambong Chenong, an ugly little fishing village in French territory, where the French have a Customs House. Here I parted with my Cambodian boatmen, dined with the kindly French Customs House officer, and spent the most miserable night I have ever experienced in a very unequal combat with the Cambodian mosquito. The next morning a Chinese steam

Off the Beaten Track

launch took Shafraz and myself down the Mesap to Pnom Penh the capital of Cambodia. It was here that I first recognised my selfish improvidence in taking a Mussulman servant with me. For some weeks poor Shafraz had been the picture of dejection, but packed up with a crew of porky Chinamen his misery was complete. He did not eat for whole days, and when I expostulated, he only replied. "Too much pork, sar." On the Mesap his misery was infectious. It was a relief to me when I was able to pack him off to Tavoy, where I hope his Burma girl was waiting, and had not run away with somebody else. Shafraz was a good servant and deserved a constant wife.

The Mesap is the outlet of the Tali Sap lake, and connects it with the Mekong at Pnom Penh. In Pnom Penh I found a very comfortable hotel, subsidised of course. It was my first introduction to the French colonist, so

A Vagabond in Asia

that I was not prepared to find a *cuisine* equal to that of the best hotels of Calcutta and Bombay. I was the more able to appreciate this unexpected luxury after being cramped up in a sampan and feeding on fish and tinned meats for over a week. Pnom Penh is not a large town, though it is the capital of the Cambodian Government; save for the court and its adherents, the Cambodians are well nigh driven out of the place before the invading Frank and the ubiquitous Chinaman. Of course it boasts a splendid red brick post-office and telegraph office, and an imposing *maison du gouverneur*. Behind the hotel there is a little mound where the French have a miniature zoo, and walk in the evenings to listen to the band. This little hillock is topped by a pagoda, which gives its name to the place; Pnom Penh signifying in Cambodian "the mountain of gold." The little I saw of the Cambodian *régime* is consonant with this misleading

Off the Beaten Track

grandiloquence. The King is a little wizened old man, the pettiest of monarchs, in whom authority is altogether forgotten. I did not see a building in his palace compound which you could not pick up and pop into the brand new French post-office, monarch and all. At the time of my visit the court was engaged in festivities. That night and the following one there were to be Chinese theatricals in honour of some anniversary. I did not wait for them, as I was told that they differed in nothing from the *lakon*, or play, of the Bangkok streets, which is so wearying to the unintelligent spectator. I have never taken up a book of travels, whose scene is in these realms of gilt and tinsel, which does not speak of the courts of Bangkok and Pnom Penh as "engaged at the time of my visit" in festivities attendant upon such a ceremony, or commemorating such and such an event. This is the key to the Siamese and Cambodian character; life

A Vagabond in Asia

with them is one long play : their existence is merely spectacular, a meaningless strutting upon the stage. They have their exits and their entrances, and the rest of their time is spent in applauding the exits and the entrances of others, their superiors. Next to a funeral, the most important ceremony amongst the Cambodians is the hair-cutting of a prince of the royal blood. Outside the palace compound at Pnom Penh I saw an enormous structure, *urbis opus*, the Eiffel of Cambodia. It was a royal funeral pyre. I was told that if I could postpone my departure a month I would witness the grandest pageant that Cambodia had ever seen. The body of some late departed near and dear relative of the king was to be burned on the pyre. What the exact connection was between the corpse and his majesty I have forgotten. I rather think it was his grandmother. *Hinc illae lacrymae*. But it was not *my* grandmother that was to be

Off the Beaten Track

burnt, I was not interested, so I left my café one evening to its group of card-playing, absinthe-sipping officers and *fonctionnaires*, and took my berth in the steam launch that carries the mail down the Mekong to Mytho. Here I spent half a day in another comfortable little subsidised hotel, and took train in the evening for Saigon, a journey of two or three hours. The Saigon-Mytho Railway runs through the fertile valley of the Mekong. It cost the French 15,000,000 francs or 200,000 francs a kilometre, some ten years ago, but has rendered no real service to trade. But that is a mere detail to a country which has spent 476 millions of francs upon one of its colonies in order to dispose of 59 million francs worth of its products. Mr. Henry Norman reckoned that "the satisfaction of including" *Le Tonkin* among the possessions of his country has cost the French tax-payer 122,239 francs—£4881—a day, Sundays included, for every day that he has had it.

A Vagabond in Asia

Saigon brings me once more to the beaten track. The French colonial capital of the East has often been described. It is a miniature Paris, with its boulevards, its *cafés*, its bright *facades*, and well-swept quays and promenades. The mingling of China with France is very picturesque. To me in the comparative cool of February, after my many wanderings, Saigon was a haven of rest. I shall always reckon the Hotel Ollivier—thanks to its immaculate *chef*—as the best hotel east of Suez. I spent a week in this subsidised city, lived in my subsidised hotel, bought my subsidised paper, drove to my subsidised opera, and finally* em-

*The French system of espionage in the colonies is as notorious as it is ludicrous. Very few travellers visit Saigon without bringing away some story of petty interference. I ordered and paid for a series of street views at a photographer's in the Boulevard Charnier; but as only a few copies were ready when my ship sailed, I gave directions to have them forwarded to me in India. They never came. The British Consul very kindly intervened in my behalf, and called on the photographer, who averred that he had sent them. I have no doubt that they have been intercepted by the Government Officials at the Post Office.

Off the Beaten Track

barked in my subsidised vessel, the s.s. *Tibre*, Messageries Maritimes, for Singapore.

HIMALAYAN SKETCHES

Himalayan Sketches

THE DOMINANT RACE—A HILLSIDE REVERIE

He was crossing the Mall in all the glory and splendour of a frock-coat. His tall black hat was distinctly outlined against a cloudless sky. As he paused in the middle of the road and stooped to light a cigar, the glossy silk was vignetted against a flawless background—the snows of Kinchinjunga. It was a picture in black and white.

The man passed on into the church; where no doubt he deposited his hat

A Vagabond in Asia

with the care that is usually bestowed on such immaculate creations.

Kinchinjunga glistened and sparkled as brilliantly as before, though there was no tall hat to set off the jewels of her rifts and spires.

Overhead was the blue of an Italian sky; below the extensive valley of the Rungnoo, with the little stream winding like a silver streak beneath the delicately shadowed forests of oak and chestnut. Beyond were the bleak hog-backed ranges of Sikkim, and over all Kinchinjunga and the snows.

The rains were over, and all the world was green, and the air was pervaded with the breath of an English spring, the warmth of summer, and the mellowness of autumn. It was the *largior æther* of a November in the Himalayas.

If ever scene was calculated to lend contentment and repose, it was this. Yet a strange feeling of uneasiness and

Himalayan Sketches

apprehension overshadowed my happiness, an undefined sensation of disquiet, which could not be attributed merely to the sense of minuteness, that most of us feel sometimes, in the midst of majestic surroundings. It was more than that: a greater issue was at stake; I had not seen a top-hat in the hills before.

On the other side of the road an old Bhootia woman was spinning her prayer-wheel, and mumbling piously the sacred charm which was to release her from all re-birth in the suffering world. Her eyes were turned towards the snows. With her left hand she fingered her beads. She at least had imbibed the true atmosphere of the place. She had embraced the skirts of a beautiful creed. In a kind of ecstatic *yoga* she had united herself with the universal spirit of Nature. She was part of a great system. She did not see the man with the tall hat.

Under a cherry tree, which was in

A Vagabond in Asia

full bloom (in the Himalayas there are two springs), my syce was dreaming—of Heaven knows what! My pony bent over him confidentially. Another picture in black and white. A bhistic passed, bowed down with his water skin, for all the world like a little shrivelled old mouse. A troop of Paharia girls passed by, laughing and jesting, resplendent with silver ornaments, and head-gear of saffron, crimson and gold. A Lepcha carried a basket of green oranges on his back. All were part of the place. The mountains, the valleys and the snows were made for these, not for the man in the church, a member of the dominant race.

Allah is good. He has given us all these things, and sometimes, when we worship in his most beautiful temples, he gives to us a creed, the testimony of our unspoken belief, for which language is too arbitrary, though some approach and herald it in song. These are the

Himalayan Sketches

poets. They sing of simplicity, for nothing that is complex is great ; of beauty, for they say that beauty is truth ; of truth, though truth is not always beauty ; of the Creator, for He made the hills.

My devotions were interrupted. A pretty girl passed in a rickshaw. I lifted my topee. They were coming out of church. The man in the tall hat passed again. He did not notice the Bhootia woman, and she did not see him. He was looking at his pointed boots : she was with Buddha and the blest.

Then I knew my uneasiness was for the dominant race.

II

A HIMALAYAN THEATRE

Imagine an amphitheatre in the Himalayas. In the background the leviathan mountains, snowy-maned, breasting the cloud waves of an illimitable ocean; the high gods on the stage, and the audience a mere vagabond—myself.

The Vagabond was alone in the Himalayas. He had traversed the ocean, steamed across the burning plains of India, and penetrated the everlasting hills in quest of that little brown Himalayan antelope which has chosen for its habitation the crags and caves of Native Sikkim. It was an evening in late September, towards the end of the rains, and he had been following a path that

Himalayan Sketches

wound in and out amongst the rocks, crossing every now and then a mountain stream that leapt down by waterfalls to the valley of the Rungeet, some seven thousand feet beneath. All about the path begonias and columbine, and the dainty little balsam fought for crevices in the rock, and gloxinias peered from their moss beds, thousands of little faces peeping curiously to watch the shadows as they crept over the forest, and the last glow dying from the magnolia trunks. Under foot the earth was covered with a delicate little yellow creeper, which scented the air with a strange fragrance. The ceaseless clamour of the cicalas, merged in the roar of a distant waterfall, fell almost soothingly on the ear. Overhead the blue sky was merging into a deeper blue. It was a colour I had once seen on a butterfly's wing.

Suddenly the path zig-zagged a little, disappeared, appeared again, and finally ushered the Vagabond into an open

A Vagabond in Asia

plot, probably at some time a *gwala's* clearing; for there was once a village in the vicinity that had been carried away one dark night with half the side of the hill. Here was the amphitheatre; the scene and the *dramatis personæ* you have understood. And the play?

You have abandoned your senses, no doubt, to the movement of some great opera that has lifted for the moment the fleshly screen. You have stood before some great picture that has embodied your notion of beauty idealised. Can you imagine a pageant of wind-swept clouds, a moving panorama, a shifting sunlit scene that is neither the one nor the other, but the divine blending of what is most beautiful, most god-like in both; whose orchestra is the roaring mountain torrent, and whose stage the greatest miracle of God—the Himalayas?

An armament of clouds was gathered in gorgeous panorama. On one side was marshalled a grey battalion of

Himalayan Sketches

knights invincible, flanked with the lurid furnace glare of celestial artillery, belching volcanic fire and bolts Promethean. From another quarter advanced a cohort of entrancing beauty, in fleecy robes of finest threaded gold, so ætherial, so delicate, that they floated half invisibly over the turquoise fields, and the gold was mingled with the blue. It was a heavenly procession, this unsubstantial cumulus of souls, a company of mould divine, painted and attired by that great hand Who

“dips

His pencil in the gloom of earthquake and eclipse.”

Undaunted they were borne, great in fearlessness, towards the battalion invincible. One felt that a great drama was being played, a crisis celestial, whose issue would be for all time. The god-like content settled on me, that visits those who may watch a struggle of everlasting significance, unheated by the throes of onset. Just then the mists

A Vagabond in Asia

arose, the skies were overshadowed; writhing fumes from the valleys obscured the lists. It was an overture that I had witnessed, an overture to a drama that will never be complete so long as poets sing and soldiers strike. God pity the man who sees the last act!

The play is over: the curtain fallen; and the Vagabond descends through the rhododendron forest to his hut. Inside the log fire is blazing cheerfully, for it is cold. He draws a chair to the hearth, and for some minutes is wrapped in the deepest meditation. Then his brow becomes puckered. A frown mars the serenity of his features as he notices for the first time an ugly yellow blotch on the bowl of his meerschaum. It is a distinct flaw. The gods are alone on Olympus.

III

HIMALAYAN SONG

THE FOREST BY GHOOM ROCK.

THE very sky is hidden overhead ;
The hopeless trunks are clasped in despair ;
Lone is the place and dreary as the dead,
No light of sun or moon has entered there :
But horrid shapes do writhe and pant for room,
And raise their cankerous arms to pierce the gloom.

Ye Saints ! What sin is theirs ? The sodden rain
Has clad them all, like corpses uninterred,
With drooping grave-cloth and with dolorous train,
Dark-clustered, draped in hideous garments weird.
What dismal errand theirs ? What sepulture ?
What dark deed done ? What penance to endure ?

“ Black work ! Black work ! ” I heard a beldam cry,
An aged, wizened hag, whose jetty hair
Hung by her toothless jowl ; so mockingly

A Vagabond in Asia

Entombéd skulls their golden tresses wear,
“Black work ! Black work,” she cried, this aged
dame.

And cursed the unholy spot past all reclaim.

God help the forest by the rock of Ghoom !
This savage place He blasted with His curse ;
What e’er the deed that dealt it such a doom,
’T were blasphemy to God to name a worse.
If poor damned souls were herded here to play,
They’d hie them back to hell for holiday.

IV

A HILL SHIKARI

SAHARMAN was a fraud. I had my suspicions when Bhero Singh brought him to the Tonglu dâk bungalow in the morning with his two nondescript dogs and his antiquated smooth-bore gun. His dreamy, venerable face spelt disappointment. In the jungle his exaggerated air of caution and his mysterious gestures as he crept through the tangled undergrowth reminded me of a stage villain in a burlesque. I felt instinctively that the old man was a very penetrable fraud. Even as I lay stretched in front of the blazing fire of rhododendron logs with a steaming glass of toddy at my elbow, watching the firelight play on my clouded

A Vagabond in Asia

meerschäum bowl and the vapour curling up from the drenched putties on the hearth, I knew that Saharman was a fraud, though I could forgive the old man, as I reviewed his day's acting: for I knew that he deceived himself. He was part of his own audience.

I had scrambled miles that day with my friend Bhero Singh, his Shikari Saharman and his two nondescript dogs, up and down the precipitous hillsides. Sometimes on all fours through the dense forests of rhododendron and bamboo. We were in search of Baloo, the big black Himalayan bear. Bhero Singh had seen three in the last week, and one had jumped down from a tree in the immediate neighbourhood and attacked a Lepcha bamboo-cutter, striking him a side blow in the face; the Lepcha beat him off with his kukri. The next day fifteen of his fellows, all armed with these weapons, pursued in the animal's tracks, but Baloo gave them the slip. When Bhero Singh

Himalayan Sketches

has a Sahib with him armed with a hard-hitting twelve-bore gun and some soft lead bullets Baloo is not at home. That day we saw no traces of him, though Saharman pointed out to me the footprints of wild boar, deer and serow. Bhero's Shikari is a very wise man ; he can tell exactly by the spoor when each animal passed, how fast it was going, and in what direction.

He stopped once and crouched knowingly over a scarcely perceptible depression in the dead leaves at his feet. "Look, Sahib," he said, "very large jungly *sur* gone by these thirteen days. What a leap from the tree yonder to the Sahib's feet! Something had frightened him and he was going very fast." Then examining the ground on each side, "There were ten or twelve of them, but they have gone down to the valley a fortnight ago, and are grubbing up old Lumbu's potatoes by this time." Such a close acquaintance with the denizens of the forest was most impressive, as no doubt it was meant to be ; but

A Vagabond in Asia

omniscience is wearying when it is not attended by results, and I was thirsting for evidence of a more recent visit. Here was the print of a serow three days old, and here a deer had gone by only last night ; even I could recognise the print of his cloven hoof distinctly outlined in the soft, oozy mud. The old Shikari halted a moment, and putting three fingers between his lips gave vent to a weird jungle cry, which seemed strangely familiar to me, though I could not remember for the life of me where I had heard it before. Bhero told me that he was calling the animals, but he could not say what beast the notes were supposed to represent.

A Himalayan forest in the rainy season presents an appearance of unspeakable gloom and desolation. Gaunt tree trunks stretch out their arms in despair. Enormous ropes of rotting vegetation hang from their branches, draped with sombre mosses and lichens, and large yellow, fleshy orchids. It was a hopeless place ;

Himalayan Sketches

one would have thought the sun had never shone there. As I leaned with my back against a rhododendron tree, waiting, my gun ready cocked, I could not help feeling a little ashamed, questioning myself whether it would be quite sportsmanlike to take advantage of the old man's magic. It seemed too much like holding out food to a tame animal that had to be done away with. My scruples were soon set at rest, for Saharman did not await the effect of his charms, and we were plunging through the dense forest, crushing over the dead bamboos, which gave a report like a small cannon whenever we set foot on them. Bhero made more noise than myself and the Shikari put together. Any animal within a mile of us must have fled in terror at our approach. I looked in vain for more open country. Far beneath us the clouds were gathered into a limitless, billowy ocean, whose surface was only broken here and there by the great hog-backed ridges which rose island-like from

A Vagabond in Asia

the sea. In the foreground gaunt trunks, bare of leaf and flower, brought to mind an illustration of Dante's "Inferno," where weird and fantastic shapes fling themselves in an agony, writhing, contorted, like aliens thrust there for some penance, doomed, desolate. Rounding the summit of the ridge, the illimitable Nepaul ranges, with Everest in the centre, a hundred miles distant, burst into view. Eastward lie the mountains of Sikkhim and Tibet. It was magnificent, but it was not sport. I had lost faith in Saharman. Bhero told me afterwards that his Shikari had never shot anything in this way, but had won his laurels by sitting up on moonlight nights in trees overlooking his neighbour's *bhutta* fields, and shooting the bears that came down from the hills to feed.

Not many months afterwards I forgave Saharman for this day's work. On the next occasion of our meeting he was promoted to head Shikari on a plantation a score of miles from the scene of our first

Himalayan Sketches

introduction; here he was the proud master of a very workmanlike pack of dogs. My host and I were shooting in a precipitous belt of forest, which harboured that shyest and most inaccessible of creatures, the serow, or *Nemorhædus bubalina*, a species of Himalayan antelope. Saharman had tracked a fine buck the night before, and he was to put his dogs on the scent and drive the beast across a rocky watercourse, where we were lying in wait. We had barely time to knock the ashes out of our first pipe when the dogs gave tongue, but Saharman's calculations were at fault. A breathless coolie reached us with the news that the antelope had broken down hill by another ravine. Then there followed a breakneck chase to intercept it, a falling and crashing through dense tearing jungle, gun in hand, clutching at sâl trunks, bursting through bamboo thickets, and hanging by tremulous boulders over rocky nullahs, until we came to a place where two streams met

A Vagabond in Asia

and saw our quarry at bay, the dogs pressing hard; there was just time for a quick, easy shot, and the poor beast lurched, dropped on his knees, and, rolling over the precipice, fell into the stream 80 feet beneath.

He lay there, his poor glazed eyes fixed without reproach or terror in an expressionless stare, as the yelping dogs tore at his wound. His long ass's ears, goat's horns, and little nimble feet that supported the great unwieldy carcase, made him look like some silly creature which might have followed in Pan's train, when he frightened the Greek maidens in the glades of Arcady. For a short remorseful moment I wished that I had—no, not missed, but that I had never seen a gun or a serow or Saharman. Then followed the sportsman's silly truculent triumph—a mood as unaccountable as his desire to slay; and I forgave Saharman those hours of weary play-acting on Tonglu.



LAMA OF SIKKIM.

V

A SON OF BUDDHA

My munshi wrote to me one morning to beg the loan of twenty rupees. Tashi Ling, his aged Bhutiah friend, was starting on a pilgrimage to the sacred chorten of Khatmandu in Nepal, where he was anxious to perform certain religious ceremonies for the spirit of his son. Tashi was very old, so old that Phuntshog said he would not come back: moreover, he was in need of the wherewithal for his journey. Thus it fell that there was an auction in the house of Tashi Ling.

The old man's effects were not extensive, a few idols and devil masks, a religious book or two, a trumpet and a drum made from the bones of a dead Lama, a dorje:

* The Lamaist Sceptre.

A Vagabond in Asia

a bell, and a painted screen, nothing more than the few religious perquisites which you will find in the house of any god-fearing, self-respecting Bhutiah. Among them, however, was a well-worn xylograph edition of the life and meditations of Milarapa, the Tibetan saint and poet. This, it seems, had excited the avarice of my munshi, Phuntshog, who was something of a bibliophile.

At first the old man had his scruples at parting with it: for the Buddhist lore forbids the bartering of sacred books, but he reasoned with his conscience effectually. The book was apocryphal, not contained in the Kahgyur or Buddhist canon; and the money was for a religious and charitable purpose. There could be no harm.

I was glad to buy the book, and charmed with its musty old-world appearance, and the quaint little illuminated tail-pieces of Milarapa and his preceptor Marpa Lotsa, each seated in the correct devo-

Himalayan Sketches

tional attitude, faintly depicted, haloed in green and gold and red and yellow.

Thankful to escape from the monotony of colloquial Tibetan I set Phuntshog to translate it; and that was the manner of my introduction to St. Milarapa.

When Tashi started on his pilgrimage, he had little more than the twenty rupees I had given him for the book, and a few chattels of my own which Phuntshog had collected for him. He left his home with the Lamas in Ghoom monastery for an unknown country, far away from his friends and the associations of his youth. The scenes of his childhood were set in pleasant places, and the memory of them was likely to lighten the last groping days of the old man's pilgrimage. Ghoom monastery, the most southern in British Sikkim, stands on the borderland between the worship of Vishnu and Buddha. In clear weather one can see the plains stretching away to the south; here the cult of Buddha is dead: to the north lie the snowy ranges of

A Vagabond in Asia

Nepaul and Tibet, where Vishnu has no votaries. From their little flower garden by the monastery the Lamas can see the sun rise over the mountains of Bhutan, touching the distant peaks of Kinchinjunga with delicate tints of rose and tulip. The sunsets are often clouded ; but sometimes the mists roll apart for a moment to reveal a valley at the lower portals of the Himalayas, bathed in a ruddy glow, through which the Balasun flows out into the plains of Bengal.

It was a raw winter's day when Tashi left the monastery. The journey was his last act of piety. He never came back.

I had often seen Tashi sitting on the stone steps of the monastery, spinning his prayer wheel and mumbling the mystic formula, "Om mani padmi hum ;" but I little thought the old man's poverty would be the means of introducing me to his unimaginable Buddhist world through the poet-saint who had been his familiar guide from childhood.

Himalayan Sketches

St. Milarapa's name does not appear in any biography. The few Europeans who have penetrated into Tibet are probably unaware that he ever existed. Dr. Waddel in his exhaustive classic on Lamaism* has conceded him one page. Sir Edwin Arnold, in his "Light of Asia," has ignored him altogether; yet for the last seven centuries he has been the most popular Saint in the Calendar with all classes in Tibet. His spirit still lives re-incarnate in a Lama at the Lho-tak monastery north of Lhassa. The Buddhist monks still read his life and Meditations, and the mendicant Lamas sing his songs. For the Tibetans are as conservative as other Orientals. With them once a poet is always a poet, once a Saint is always a Saint. They are strangers to the attic game of poet-making and poet-taking. The voice of the populace is their only standard of criticism, and its verdict is not likely

* Since writing the above the Rev. Graham Sanberg has contributed an interesting paper on Milarapa to *The Nineteenth Century*, October, 1899.

A Vagabond in Asia

to be changed in a paltry seven hundred years.

Milarapa's Life and Poems are especially interesting, as they belong to the few indigenous books of the country. The great Tibetan scriptures, the Kahgyur of a hundred and eight volumes, and the Tangyur, a massive commentary, are both translations from the Sanskrit and Indian. Other sacred writings, for the most part manuscripts, are preserved in the monasteries, but very few secular books are printed. In Tibet there is no freedom of the press: the Lamas exercise a strict supervision over the literature of the country, and every manuscript must be submitted to an official at Lhasa before its publication is sanctioned.

The Milarapa xylograph, which consisted of three volumes, the 100,000 songs of the Saint, his life, and the life of his teacher, Marpa Lotsa, was edited by Rachungpa, who in a vision visited

Himalayan Sketches

Urgyen the land of the blessed, and heard Buddha discoursing upon the lives of the holy Saints Tilo, Naro and Marpa.

On the morrow Buddha was going to narrate the history of Milarapa which was more wonderful than all that had been told before, for others obtained wisdom by the collected virtue of many lives, but Milarapa obtained greater wisdom than these in one life and in one body. Now the lives of Tilo, Naro, and Marpa had been written, but there was no record of the life of Milarapa. So the people of Urgyen asked "Where is Milarapa?" and Buddha answered, "He is in the land of men below." Then Rachungpa woke from his vision and went to Milarapa, who was preaching to his disciples and the people of Nya Num, and entreated him to relate the story of his life that it might be made known for the benefit of the creatures.

A Vagabond in Asia

Milarapa was born in the first month of Autumn in the water-male-dragon year on the fifth day. His father, a merchant, Sherab Gyau Tshen was trading in the South when he was informed of the birth of his son. Hearing the good news he named the child "Thoipaga"—I am glad by hearing. Milarapa's parents possessed great riches, and mixed in the best society of the village. When Thoipaga was only seven years old his father fell into a serious illness, and the physicians and divines despaired of his life. He called together his relations and neighbours, and in their presence he spake his last will and testament. "To his uncle and aunt I entrust the special care of my son, and when he is old enough let him take Zesay to wife and inherit the remainder of my wealth. Until then the happiness of my wife and children are in the hands of you all, and of uncle and aunt especially. In no wise let them be troubled. I will be

Himalayan Sketches

watching you and them from the hollow of my grave."

When their father died Thoipaga and his little sister were sent to work in the fields by their guardians, who abused Sherab Gyau Tshen's trust, and treated the children with great harshness and cruelty.

"When father Sherab Gyau Tshen was living," writes Milarapa; we preserve Phuntshog's rendering, "high and low looked to the smiling countenance of us; afterwards the countenance of uncle and aunt was made to smile. Our food was like dog's food; the work like the work of an ass, our clothes ragged, and from continual labour our limbs broke into sores, and from bad food and clothes our skin became wrinkled. Our hair which was formerly decorated with gold and turquoise became filled with lice and dirt. The people who saw and heard our condition could not help weeping. The parents of Zesay gave me clothes

A Vagabond in Asia

and food, and comforted me again and again saying that there would be a time to earn the perishable wealth."

When Thoipaga was fifteen years old and of an age to marry Zesay, his mother called together his uncle and aunt and the relatives and neighbours who were present when the will of his father Sherab Gyau Tshen was read, and asked that the property should be handed over to her son.

"To which the uncle and aunt replied angrily, 'Where is your property, when Sherab Gyau Tshen was in good health we lent him the property he had, and when he died he gave us back our own.' Then they beat my mother and chastised my sister and me with an iron rod. My mother wept and called on my father Sherab Gyau Tshen, 'You have promised to watch from the hole of your grave,' thus saying my mother rolled on the ground weeping, and we also wept, brother and sister.

Himalayan Sketches

Then uncle and aunt and neighbours went away; but some remained and comforted us, saying that they would beg for us and find us what they could, and my mother's brother arranged that my mother and sister would live with him, and I was sent to a teacher. My food and clothing were supplied by Zesay's parents and Zesay was often sent to me to comfort me while my mother and sister were under the care of my uncle."

After a year Milarapa was sent by his mother to a Lama to learn the art of destroying people by sorcery. He applied himself to the art so successfully that he was able to destroy 35 of his uncle's guests and relatives by making the roof of a house fall in at the ceremony of their son's marriage, and afterwards sent hail to destroy their harvest. But Milarapa soon repented of the "black work."

"The desire of religion pressed hard upon me so that I had no desire for

A Vagabond in Asia

food. When I was walking I wished to sit down, and when I was sitting down I wished to walk. In the night I had no sleep."

Afterwards Milarapa went to learn the "holy religion" from Marpa Lotsa, who had himself studied in India under the famous sage Naropa. For many months Marpa subjected him to the most severe penances and the strictest ascetic exercises; failure and disappointment did not deter him from the faith, and he continued in self-mortification until he was delivered from the misery of a separate existence.

The third volume of the edition contains the songs of Milarapa as edited by his disciple Rachungpa. The faded ink and well thumbled margins indicate the favourite passages of my aged Bhutiah friend: Phuntshog turned to them instinctively the very first morning he came to me with the prize. One little poem he read me I remember

Himalayan Sketches

especially : it came to me as a revelation of the intense feeling for nature which pervades Milarapa's work, a sympathy which Phuntshog tells me is characteristic of the Buddhist writings of Tibet. It was a song which Milarapa sang when troubled by evil spirits, in praise of Eagle Castle—the solitary rocky cave in the Tibetan Himalayas which was the sage's abode when he first acquired "the holy white religion," and the scene of his first victories over the powers of evil. Milarapa sang :—

Wherever I journey I sing a song of praise ; to
this place also I offer a song.

This is the song of poor Milarapa
Speed it ye winds and carry it afar,
Where Marpa and the holy Lamas are.

Here is my Castle hanging in the skies
This blessed spot the Lama did devise
For Mila and the holy votaries.

White fleecy clouds are floating overhead ;
Above, below the woods are shadowed ;
And underneath the river winds its bed.

There is no flower in all the wilderness,
That does not breathe its fragrance here to bless ;
Nor any tree that grows companionless.

A Vagabond in Asia

The happy birds are singing all day long ;
The hum of bees is heard the flowers among ;
And in the forest Mila hears their song.

Here in the forest birds and beasts engage,
Each in his course as each has heritage ;
In holy meditation dwells the sage.

God, Mila and this holy place are one ;
Therefore, ye devils, wait no benison ;
Drink ye the wine of love and get ye gone.

When Mila had finished singing the devils did not leave the cave. He calls them "the children of his inclination," meaning that they had power to molest him because he had not entirely renounced the allurements of the transitory life. He had risen that morning from his meditations to prepare food ; there was flour and salt as well as other food in the cave, but no firewood on the hearth. When the sage saw this he went out to collect wood, and when he had gathered as much as his apron could hold, a great wind arose so that when he held the cloak the wind blew away the wood, and when he held the wood the wind blew away the cloak, "For

Himalayan Sketches

all my meditations, yet have I not renounced the inclinations of the world. Take the wood or the cloak if you will," he said to the wind and relinquished both. Then he fell to the ground senseless, for it was long since he had partaken of food. When he awoke from his swoon the hurricane had passed, and returning to the cave he found the devils waiting him. His song of praise to Eagle Castle did not convince them.

Two other devils joined them and all uttered different cries. Some gnashed their teeth and showed their tusks, and some gave vent to violent and unrestrained laughter. Milarapa anxious to quell the clamour of these who were not men, repeated certain charms. Still they did not go. Great sorrow entered the heart of the sage. 'Marpa has not taught me all,' he said, 'I have exhorted them and they have not gone,' yet he was patient and resolving not to fear the devils, sang this song.—"I bow to the feet of Marpa. Oh, my father, who hast conquered four companies of devils. I call not myself a man.

"I am the son of the White Lion; Three skills I inherited from my mother's womb. I slept in the cradle in my childhood until I grew to look over the edge of the cradle. In my

A Vagabond in Asia

youth I travelled in the snowy mountains. I care not though the mountains of snow be spun round: though the rocks be very large, I care not. I call not myself a man.

"I am the son of Eagle, King of birds; I had feathers from the shell. In my childhood I slept in the nest, until I grew to look over the edge of the nest. In my youth of eagle I darted through the firmament. I care not though the firmament be wide. I care not though the path be steep. I am no man.

"I am the son of the Great Fish. From my mother's womb my golden eyes revolved. In my childhood I slept in the nest until I grew to look over the edge of the nest. In my youth of fish I swam round the ocean. I care not, though the waves of the ocean be great. I care not, though there be many nets and hooks. I am no man.

"I am the son of the Lama Kargyud. I had faith from the womb of my mother. In my childhood I began to study. In my boyhood I became a disciple, and in my youth I wandered in the forest. I care not though the devils molest me. I care not though there be demons and transformations of demons.

"A Lion cannot be frozen in the snow. If a Lion be frozen in the snow, of what avail are the three skills.

"An eagle cannot fall from the firmament. If an eagle fall from the firmament, of what avail is it to have wings.

"A fish cannot be drowned in the water. If a

Himalayan Sketches

fish can be drowned in the water of what avail is it to be born in the sea.

“A block of iron cannot be broken by a stone. If iron can be destroyed by stone, of what avail is the casting ?

“I, Milarapa, fear not the devils ; if I fear the devils of what avail is my meditation.”

When he had sung he entered the cave. The devils rolled their eyes in terror, trembling so that the rock of the cave shook. Suddenly they were gone. Milarapa said, ‘Benyaka the prince of the devils has brought this hurricane and the transformation of the demons, but me he could not injure on account of the grace of the Lama (Marpa),’ afterwards the sage received great benefit from meditation.

Long months of abstinence in the mountains ; ceaseless, solitary meditation ; constant self-mortification, and the renunciation of all worldly desire made Milarapa impervious to the attacks of hunger and cold, so that in his songs of exhortation to the devils he claimed kinship with the creatures of the forest and the elemental forces of nature. One winter he left his disciples of Nya Num and departed to a cave in the snowy mountains to meditate alone. Snow fell

A Vagabond in Asia

incessantly for eighteen days after his departure so that the passes were blocked and the Nya Num people were not able to visit him. When the winter was over they set out to bring home his body, cutting their way through the snow with axes and knives until they arrived at the door of the cave. They found the sage meditating, and he rebuking them for their want of faith sang this song of victory over the elements—

Ere Tiger year was out or Hare year in,
My mind was shaped to the holy wheel ;
That it might hold the same. So, on a day,
The sixth o' the month, I sought the barrier
Of all the snowy mountains. Earth and sky
Conspired together, sent their messengers
Of hail and rain. The Southern cloud came forth,
And sun and moon were holden prisoner.
The planet Duka shone with double light ;
And all the eight—the lesser stars were hid—
Stood bound in iron chains. Nine days and nights
The wingèd snowflakes fell ; some large as bees,
And some as mustard seeds. The topmost peak
Was covered with the fall, and far below
The forest lay asleep, her bosom prest :
The peaks, erst shadowy, shone with crystal lights :
The wavy seas were stilled, and every stream

Himalayan Sketches

Was stifled in its course. So high and low
Was none ; but all was level. Such a storm
Brought famine to the door of man and beast ;
The mouse like treasure hid him in the earth,
And wingèd fowls did seek their food in vain.
The mouths of beasts were bound. How fared
the sage ?

What was the portion of Milarapa ?
Cave-covering above, the new year's blast,
The sage's sheet ; these three, sheet, cave, and blast
Did battle on the heights, snow-prisoned, lone ;
Until the snows were melted and the blast
Was still. The sage's sheet, a flaming brand,
Subdued the vaunting God, and so he died.
Since when is peace ; the winds have passed in rain,
Both hot and cold ; the elements have bowed
At Mila's feet, for Mila conquered them.
I am the son of fire ; 'The Tiger's kin,
No fox to flee of common parentage,
But noble race, sprung from the Lion, King ;
My home the snowy mountains. Did I list
The counsel of the eld ; then had I passed
Ere I had lifted self to higher state.
Many a sage has gone the way I went,
And many died, but I Milarapa
Will die, and dying fill the earth
With my renown ; may ye, my followers,
All die in faith. Mila was happy then
Upon the mountains. Is it well with you ?

The sage's ascetic life of meditation in
the mountains heightened the sympathy

A Vagabond in Asia

with nature which he imbibed with his Buddhist teachings. The law of Gautama against the taking of life is most minutely observed in Tibet, and the scruple that rose from the fear of injuring a being which might be inhabited by the incarnate soul of a previous existence has fathered a genuine love of all living creatures. Every evening the monk repeats a spell thrice and spits on the side of his foot, so that all the insects which have died under his foot during the day may be born again as souls in the paradise of Indra. The mendicant Lamas carry a *kharsil*,* or alarm staff with jingling bells to frighten away small animals lest they be trodden on and killed. Many Lamas build their houses without doors and have their food put in through the window to avoid trampling on the worms and insects that would cross the threshold. Even the godless hunters who visited Milarapa in the cave at Tagkartasa

* Waddell, *Lamaism of Tibet*, p. 211.

Himalayan Sketches

begged him to save the souls of the animals they had killed, and cleanse them of their sins.

Allied to this respect for the minutest of living creatures is the intense love of natural scenery which pervades Milarapa's poems. The same spirit which moved the Saint to sing the song of praise to Eagle Castle influences the Buddhist priests of the present century, who often choose for the sites of their monasteries the most inaccessible mountain crags, rocky and precipitous, facing the east for choice ; landmarks revered by the worldling crofters in the bosom of the plain. For Buddha is reserved the highest place—

“ Here, here's his place where meteors
 shoot, clouds form,
Lightnings are loosened,
Stars come and go ; Let joy break with the storm
 Peace let the dew send
Lofty designs must close in like effects.”

The popularity of the 100,000 songs of Milarapa proves that the feeling is deeply rooted in the Tibetan character. Elo-

A Vagabond in Asia

quent with love of the grand mountain scenery of the country, and profusely coloured with picturesque allusion to the wild creatures of the forest, these poems seem to point that Buddhism may claim disciples to whom its pessimistic doctrine is not entirely the loveless, unemotional philosophy it is represented.

Illustrative of the Buddhist feeling for nature Phuntshog translated Milarapa's encounter with the rock-devil of Ling. The devil of the place caught the sage's foot as he was passing, and would not leave it. Milarapa sang,

“I sing five parables of song, six with meaning: meet the meaning, devil of the rock.

High in the blue the sun and moon do ride,
And swathe the earth below in their caress
East, West and North and South, they post betide,
For they are God's own wondrous palaces:
Shame not the light that shines this earth to bless.

Far in the East against the firmament
Peak upon peak the snowy mountains rise
Lion, the king, on no oppression bent

Himalayan Sketches

Doth pass in rocky caves amidst the skies :
Be not, ye icy winds, his enemies.

The Tiger in the forest of the South
Is very queen and every beast her thrall,
And when she dares the rugged steep, uncouth,
For that she queenly lords it over all ;
Friend Earth, be not her foe, nor ill befall.

Deep in the waters of the Western Lake
The happy dancers gambol in their play :
And when they swim with golden eyes, awake
To scan the distant ocean for their prey
Let no unfriendly hook, nor net betray.

In the red palace of the rocky North
Eagle is King of fowls and votary
Of all the winged tribes. He goes not forth
To slay or plunder. God's own prophet he.
Be not ye traps and snares his enemy.

Here Mila dwells the holy birds among
And they are his, the sage who loveth best
To help all creatures with his prayer and song :
For that of all he is the holiest
Let no she-devil hinder or molest."

The devil met the meaning ; Lion, Tiger,
Eagle, Fish, by preying upon weaker
creatures, sin and meet destruction. So
the sage being subject to doubt and in-
clination is troubled by devils.

Milarapa continued to be troubled by

A Vagabond in Asia

visitations of evil spirits until he had renounced all worldly inclination, and became perfect in the faith of the wheel. He acquired later the power of soaring from place to place and of projecting himself into the bodies of other creatures. Afterwards, though prepared for the blissful state of Nirvana, he remained on this earth with his disciples, encouraging and exhorting them and convincing the evil spirits for the good of all beings.

“When the sun was high risen on the seventeenth day of winter in the wood-hare year and in the eighty-fourth year of his life, the Grand Lama was received into the region of the blessed.”

So Milarapa, not by the collected virtue of many existences, but in one existence and in one body, passed beyond the circle of sensation and became absorbed in the divine essence. He sang of the godlike white mountains, the sunny valleys, the fragrant flowers and happy beasts and birds. As Phuntshog and I

Himalayan Sketches

read his poems it was not his metaphysical subtleties that attracted us, nor had we much sympathy with his creed, but we were filled with a sense of the mountains and the forests, and we recognised in the poet a fellow worshipper of the god of the open air. In this life, before the attainment of Nirvana, he had become one with the universal spirit of nature. To-day Milarapa is revered by thousands in Tibet as the inspired founder of a sect, whose degenerate disciples profess a creed that has no more likeness to the pure teachings of Buddha than the rude frescoes in their temples have to the paintings of Michael Angelo.

IN THE NEARER EAST

In the Nearer East

BY THE WATERS OF BABYLON

AT last I was alone at Bers* Nimrud. I had purchased with gold the desertion of my zaptieh escort, who were responsible for my safety to the Turkish Government. Khaled was waiting with the horses, hidden from view behind a domed Arab tomb, not two hundred paces away. I had left my host, Mahmoud Effendi, smoking his *kalium*,

* Bers in Chaldean signifies confusion, and by this name the tower is known to the Arabs to-day. Archæologists believe that the ruins at Bers are the relics of a tower built by Nebuchadnezzar on the site of the ancient Tower of Babel.

A Vagabond in Asia

an honoured guest in a Bedouin shepherd's tent; his attendants were brewing their rich Mocha coffee in a beaked pot, waiting my return.

The sun was setting over Bers and the Euphrates, and casting on the horizon the faintest girdle of amethyst. At my feet the great river broadened into a lake, as though in homage to the historic mound whereon I stood, the monument of man's presumption and his fall, his littleness and greatness, his short-lived triumph and his enduring shame.

This then was Bers, the ancient Babel, a rugged tower dominating the landscape, rising from the *débris* of its base; and the plain below was the plain of Shinar, where the children of Noah said: "Go to, let us build us a city and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."

In the Nearer East

Eastward the river narrows to the skyline, where lie the ruins of buried Babylon amongst the palm trees on the skirts of the desert. Beyond stretch the illimitable solitudes, niggard and infinite, to the horizon's bound; all the plain that was once Babylonia, where kings were set up and removed; religions and cults had birth and died; gods were honoured and disowned; where sped the wheels of Nebuchadnezzar and Evil Merodach and the victorious chariots of Cyrus and Alexander. But where was all now? Dust of palaces, ashes of kings, scattered to the winds like the chaff of the summer threshing floors, perished and forgotten with the consuming years.

I pictured the plain ablaze with their chariots and spearmen. I saw the glittering Macedonian phalanx, and the procession of the priests of Belus swinging incense, strewing flowers as they issued from the gates of Babylon to

A Vagabond in Asia

meet the invading king. I imagined—but I was rudely awakened from my reverie by a sudden clatter of hoofs over the loose stones beyond the tower. An ulstered figure was approaching on a shaggy white mule: behind him rode three zaptiehs, privates of the Turkish military police, handsome moustachioed fellows, clad in long cloaks and high jackboots, with Sniders thrown over their shoulders—much too military for mules.

The ulstered, Christie-hatted disturber of my solitude dismounted by my side and revealed himself.

“Waal stranger! How d’ye size up Babylon? Guess you’ve heard the Philippines have slid into our hat.”

He was a little man and I could have wrung his neck easily, but even in the wilderness of Mesopotamia we are subject to the craven system which exists to frustrate the just requital of our wrongs.

In the Nearer East

“Waal, I allers calculated I’d circulate round some before I turned up my toes to the daisies. Never saw a ship sail out of New York harbour but what I wanted to board her. That’s me, Tobias Gubbins, of New York City. Follow the lap-robe trade.”

I cast about for a retreat. Khaled was waiting behind the tomb.

“Reckon I’ve had to scrape gravel to see this pra-arie. Don’t fancy them Turks and Ar-rabs, if you ask me. Left my pal at Baghdad—one-horse place; no sort of hotel there anyhow.”

I edged my way cautiously towards Khaled and the horses. Tobias Gubbins followed me foot by foot.

“Now last fall I and a party went a little va-cation picnic in my country. We went nineteen hundred miles on the cars. I figured it up so, without——”

“What country?” I asked innocently.

We had now reached the tomb and I saw Khaled tightening the saddle-

A Vagabond in Asia

girths. I beckoned to him, and he was at my side. We mounted silently; so silently that we rode off without interrupting a torrent of oratory. Soon we were cantering over the broken ground to Hilleh, but before we were out of earshot I caught the opening of a great peroration.

“My country . . . in the last hundred and ten years grown to a magnificent constitution . . . Philippines . . . dropped into our hat . . . Admiral Dewey's orders were . . . AND destroyed it. That's Dewey.”

The orator stood with hand stretched out to the West. He was addressing the Euphrates and the setting sun. His zaptiehs were regarding him with unintelligent bewilderment. So the drama of Babel was played again. And as I rode I thought of how the Lord did there confound the language of man, and how relentlessly the Nemesis of the children of Noah has pursued them

In the Nearer East

through the centuries to the uttermost
ends of the earth.

II

WITH THE CAMEL POST TO DAMASCUS

WHEN I saw Moussa I understood what the American Consul meant when he spoke of a driver's face. I had called on the Consul a few days before with Khaled, the camel-dealer, who supplies the Turkish post with dromedaries for the journey between Baghdad and Damascus. At the time I was under the impression that Khaled was to accompany me across the desert; but the Consul knew better. "That is not a driver's face," he said. Now Moussa's was unquestionably a driver's face. It was like an old coffee-coloured parchment. The heavy brow was furrowed and pitted with years of exposure to the fiery heat of August and

In the Nearer East

the fierce cold of January nights in the Syrian desert ; the grizzled hair of his cheeks matted his face almost to the eyes ; his beard might have been a sprig of withered tamarisk bush ; his eyes, neither expectant nor reminiscent, infinitely patient, infinitely resigned, were cast from long habit on the sky-line. Moussa and the camel are inseparably connected in my memory. When I used to wake in the desert from dreaming of some English garden or crowded city, I would peer out of my sheepskins to see the camel's arched neck framing a starry ring of sky, with head posed so motionless, that were it not for a slight twitching of the mouth you would think the patient beast asleep. My thoughts turned instinctively to Moussa. The old man would be nursing his beaked coffee-pot over the scanty embers of a thorn-bush fire, as patient as fate. He looked like one who had been devoted from his youth to a great trust in which his life centred. I cannot remember ever

A Vagabond in Asia

having seen Moussa or the camel asleep. Moussa never looked quite comfortable when out of the saddle ; the jogging swing of the camel was second nature to him, and I have no doubt that he would have suffered extreme discomfort in an easy chair. The old man was plainly clad in long black boots, a very dilapidated, weather-worn sheepskin cloak, and a brown hood clasped with a simple black *aagal* ; all of which seemed quite insufficient against the icy winds that after sunset swept across the desert from Lebanon. Relics of brass buttons and an edging of red braid revealed that there had been some pretence of a uniform. As might be expected, his figure was slightly bent, and his gait a rather difficult shamble ; but he never lost his peculiar Arab dignity, which was heightened perhaps by the burden of his trust and the memory of that longer journey of his youth to the prophet's tomb at Mecca. At least such were my impressions of Haji Moussa, the old man who,

In the Nearer East

in Oriental parlance, was my father and my mother during the long ride over the desert from Baghdad to Damascus. I obeyed him in all things implicitly, as one does the captain of a ship. His attitude was paternal enough to make me feel a child again and wonder if I had been good at the end of each day. Life in the desert with Moussa was so new and unaccustomed.

We left Baghdad one morning early in January, much the coldest time of the year in the valleys of Mesopotamia. The puddles in the lanes which led out of the city wore a thin coat of ice, and there was hoar frost on the ground. To protect myself against the cold, as well as to disguise my European identity, I had purchased a heavy sheepskin coat in the Baghdad bazaars and wore over my deer-stalking cap a Bedouin turban fastened with the customary black *aagal*. When one has passed beyond the Euphrates valley into the lawless Bedouin country

A Vagabond in Asia

the precaution is very necessary, though in my case it proved ineffectual.

We started without the post. It was to follow in the evening and pick us up before we reached Hitt on the Euphrates, whence we struck off into the desert of Palmyra. We travelled very slowly that first day, and an hour before sunset we turned off the track to some shepherds' huts on the left, where Moussa was warmly welcomed. Moussa laid my quilt between the camel-bags on the leeward side of a low thorn fence which sheltered the Arabs' rude goat-hair tents. I was not a little surprised to find that he intended to sleep here, though I expected to be roused every minute. In the middle of the night a little twelve-hand rat of a pony arrived, panting and neighing, laden with the mails and a second postman, and escorted by two Zaptiehs, privates of the Turkish military police. In my imaginings I had pictured the famous post, half a score of men splendidly mounted, galloping across

In the Nearer East

country with the mails, attended by a large escort, relays every twenty miles up to the Euphrates, then a hurried transfer to the fast-trotting dromedaries ready harnessed on the further bank, and the terrible ceaseless ride of eight days and nights over the parched desert to Damascus. The reality fell ludicrously short of my dreams. For two days this poor little spent pony struggled in our wake, and we made short stages, travelling slowly to enable it to keep up with us. I used to sit on the mails to drink my coffee, and when the bags gaped too ominously, Moussa would patch them up with his darning needle.

It was not until the fourth morning after leaving Baghdad that we first sighted Hitt. We spent half a day there. Then the ride began in earnest, and I found that all the difficulties of the way were crowded into that forced march over the Palmyra desert; and the motive of this furious haste and the consequent hardships and

A Vagabond in Asia

fatigue of the journey was not to expedite the post, as I had imagined, but, for the sake of man and camel, to curtail so far as possible the passage of the inhospitable wilderness between the Euphrates valley and the mountains of Anti-Lebanon. When we reached the first pasturage of Syria by the village of Doumeir, Moussa became as dilatory as ever. The conveyance of the mails seemed to cause him no anxiety. For my own part I was glad of these delays, as the slow camel-riding had given me an acute pain in the small of my back. One gets used to the motion in time, when the muscles are hardened and accustomed, but it was a great relief to become inured to it gradually. It was also very pleasant to sit round the fire with Moussa's friends, smoking and drinking coffee, listening to their chatter and trying to understand it. The *feringhi* was often the theme of conversation; though there was none of the rude and inquisitive scrutiny of person and paraphernalia which

In the Nearer East

is so annoying in the further East. The simple shepherd-folk were perfect gentlemen, courteous, dignified, hospitable, independent. Moussa was evidently a great favourite and well known to wayfarer and *fellaheen*. I soon became very fond of the old man. After the evening meal of rice and dates and *khobes*, the strong coffee and the strong tobacco and the fatigues of the day would have their effect, and I would lie back in my sheep-skin and warm Persian quilt and listen to the talk, until the forms by the fire became more indistinct, the strange voices more meaningless, and the two camels, who seemed to watch over us all, more and more unreal. When I woke in the night there they were still, their black eyes fixed above us and beyond us on the starry sky-line, patient, motionless, expressionless, unintelligent, unintelligible as the Sphinx. I remember but one lapse from this impassiveness, born of the desert. One night as I was making my bed, my poor beast, suffering

A Vagabond in Asia

from days of hunger and thirst, swung his head round, detached my pillow and began demurely to chew it. Moussa spoke a few plain words, reproachfully as an elder brother might, and gently took the pillow away.

The days before Hitt passed very uneventfully. We saw a village or two, and in the Euphrates valley every now and then a man would rise from his plough to seize Moussa's hand and raise it to his lips. It is a custom of the country ; but Haji Moussa is a very lovable old man.

On the morning of the fourth day, on the summit of a sandhill, we first sighted Hitt. In the far distance wreaths of dense, black smoke issuing from the vicinity of a lofty, chimney-like tower offered the incongruous suggestion of a manufacturing town in the Midlands. Instinctively we drove our camels on at a fast trot until the little post-pony became a diminutive dot in our rear. As we approached nearer, Hitt revealed

In the Nearer East

itself, a walled city built on a low hill, with its rows of serried housetops giving it the appearance of one huge battlemented fortress dominated by a single towering minaret; for the chimney proved a minaret, and the smoke rose from the bitumen wells outside the city. We had to wait our time on the Euphrates bank, while the great oblong ferry-boats plied across the stream, heavily laden with flocks of sheep and goats and asses. The scene by the river-bank suggested a people in migration; horses were neighing, asses braying, camels gurgling, sheep bleating, and herdsmen shouting. In this medley Moussa was hailed by many acquaintances. The old man was so respected that we had no occasion to wait our turn. So soon as we could persuade the kicking, struggling, protesting camels to embark, the post was added to our burden, and we took leave of my friend the belated carrier of mails.

A Vagabond in Asia

A few minutes after noon we were entering Hitt by the north gate. The little city is so compact that you would think there was not possibly room for a camel; the butt of Moussa's old blunderbuss, which was packed securely underneath the camel-bags, rattled against the wall as we ascended the street, and the bags jammed uncomfortably at the corners. We drew up in a narrow, tortuous alley at the house of one of Moussa's friends. A room was cleared for me and a fire lit on the floor. It was the only occasion that we slept under a roof. I would have much preferred the open desert; for our quarters, though no doubt the cleanest in the city, compared unfavourably with any old disused limekiln or ruined caravanserai. Luckily it was not the season for vermin. We were visited by all the magnates of the town, including one or two Turkish officials, and one particularly shabby-looking son of

In the Nearer East

Æsculapius, who attached himself to me with the persistency of a leech. The only way I could find to rid myself of this affliction was to walk very fast into the desert until he gave up pursuit as hopeless, when, skirting a palm-grove, I would enter the city by another gate. Once free of my friend I took the opportunity of exploring Hitt. It is the dirtiest, unsavouriest, sleepest and most biblical-looking city I have ever seen. There is hardly breathing room in the narrow winding alleys that run down to the river-bank. One has to edge along the walls to avoid the contamination of the open sewers of the street, which poison the air the year through, until an occasional winter shower washes the noisome filth and offal into the river, where the women go to fill their pitchers. The houses are dark and windowless, unrelieved by the picturesque gables which lend their charm to the purlieus of Baghdad and Damascus. Where

A Vagabond in Asia

doors are opened to admit the impurer air of the streets, one catches a glimpse sometimes of families stabled together in rooms half choked with smoke, chimneyless except for the insufficient aperture in the roof. The most astonishing feature of the place is that the streets show traces of having once been paved with bitumen. The mystery of these incredible evidences of a past civilisation is explained by the wells outside the south gate, whose dense fumes, when the wind blows from that quarter, envelope the city in a suffocating cloud, which must act as a wholesome disinfectant.* Thus no doubt

*There is an interesting reference to the bitumen wells of Hitt, in the narrative of Master Ralph Fitch, 1583. Hakluyt's "Principall Navigations," 1599-1600.

"By the river Euphrates two dayes iourney from Babylon at a place called Ait, in a fielde neare vnto it, is a strange thing to see; a mouth that doth continually throwe foorth against the ayre boyling pitch with a filthy smoke; which pitch doth runne abroad into a great fielde which is alwayes full thereof. The Moores say that it is the mouth of hell. By reason of the great quantitie of it, the men of that countrey doe pitch their

In the Nearer East

is the city saved from the ravages of disease. It is a relief to follow the continuous stream of half-veiled women, who glide noiselessly down the street to the Euphrates bank. The river is dammed in the centre to direct the current against the huge unwieldy waterwheels, which revolve slowly in the arches of great stone-work piers built half across the stream. The water is caught in small earthen jars attached to the palm-leaf flanges and emptied into an elevated drain which is distributed in a thousand little runnels over the palm-gardens. I have seen waterwheels in Cambodia constructed on identically the same plan. Many of the piers are ruined and unrepaired, and the huge, creaking frames, doomed to pursue unceasingly their purposeless evolutions, add vastly to the

boates two or three inches thicke on the outside, so that no water doth enter into them."

The Babylon Fitch speaks of is Baghdad. The cauldron-shaped "kufas" which one meets on the Tigris, are thickly covered with bitumen from the Hitt wells.

A Vagabond in Asia

quaint picturesqueness of a scene strikingly characteristic of Oriental ineptitude, and eloquent of the pathetic aimlessness of a people crusted with the conservatism of centuries. North and south the city is fringed with palm gardens, now suffused with the soft, violet haze of sunset. Eastward lies the Euphrates, and westward stretch the interminable solitudes of the Palmyra desert. There lies my path. As I ascend the winding street to Moussa's lodging, I am seized with a burning eagerness to be on the road, to explore the best and worst of the desert, and to become inured to its hardships as quickly as I may. The twelve hours' stay in this walled city was very galling. My only solace was the thought that in a day or two I should have gauged my powers of enduring the ordeal of fatigue and exposure. I hated this enforced dallying on the brink ; but the custom of the East is obdurate.

It was with a feeling of awe that I led

In the Nearer East

my camel down the street the next morning in the chill grey before dawn. Neither Moussa nor I spoke a word. We mounted silently and urged our camels at once into a fast trot. Looking back I saw Hitt haloed by the glory of the rising sun. Thick clouds hung over it, flecked with fire like the skirts of smoke above a great conflagration. Then the track dipped down into a hollow and we passed between low sandhills on either side, left the last palm-fringed village to the north, and rode contentedly into the illimitable desolation beyond. The sense of the desert was upon me, the embracing soothing spirit of unconfinedness, as we rode on to woo the solitude and peace of those boundless wastes, too real, too awful for monotony.

Grey plain all round,
Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound,
I might go on ; nought else remained to do.

We made a halt at sundown to cook rice for the evening meal ; then on again into the darkness. After sunset we used

A Vagabond in Asia

to rein into a walk, the camel's most uncomfortable pace, and Moussa would take my rein, guiding himself by the stars through these dark, moonless nights. By some mysterious instinct he kept the beasts to the track. Hour after hour we rode on until time seemed an eternity ; a cold breeze swept the desert, and in spite of my wrappings and sheepskins the wind bit icily. After several hours I became half numbed and unconscious until I fancied myself swimming at sea, breasting the billows of an illimitable ocean ; then again I was a boat in tow, as with every swinging step of my camel a little wave of wind broke against my face and chilled me to the bone. I would wake myself with an effort from this unhealthy state of torpor, for it was a long drop from the saddle to the ground, and in the desert a broken limb is little short of death. So we rode on silently, speechlessly, threading the darkness of the night, until I felt my beast stop, just as a boat

In the Nearer East

grazes the welcome shore, and Moussa was alongside of me, with quaint sounds bidding the beasts kneel. The bliss of that moment was unspeakable. Then we built our house, the bags to windward of us, the warm wall of a camel on either side; and above us the stars. But still in my half-consciousness I was being propelled against the resistless waves, and for weeks an imponderable presence was driving me on over that desert sea to Scham, haunting my sleep and interpenetrating my dreams.

It was on the second day after leaving Hitt that we fell in with the Bedouin. We had marked the low black tents of an encampment the evening before far on the northern horizon, and early that morning we had met two men on the track who must have taken word to the Shèikh that there was a *feringhi* with the post. We had been riding some hours and it must have been nearly noon, when I noticed that Moussa was beckoning to me and

A Vagabond in Asia

pointing over his back. I turned and saw some dim objects bearing down upon us from the horizon. As I drew my camel closer up to his, Moussa whispered hoarsely, "Bedou, Bedou!" and placing a finger on his lip he drew the wrist of his right hand ominously across his throat, grimly indicative of our possible fate if I said a word or showed any resistance. They were on us in an instant. Two ruffianly-looking men leapt from the first camel and seized our reins, motioning to us to dismount. They immediately began rifling our bags. The second camel brought two more on the scene, better featured and of more dignified bearing than the first. A third followed, and its rider, an altogether superior-looking man, evidently the Sheikh of the tribe, greeted us with the customary *Salaam Aleikoum*. The contrast between him and his followers was very marked. It was hard to believe that they were of the same race; for I have seldom seen two more villain-

In the Nearer East

ous, murderous-looking ruffians than our first assailants. As the Sheikh rode up they ceased ransacking the camel-bags and began gorging themselves on a bag of dates and *khobez*, which they devoured rapaciously.

During this scene Moussa began to busy himself with lighting a fire and boiling coffee. He affected the attitude of a host, resigning himself graciously to the entertainment of importunate guests. Meanwhile I had been engaged in examining the Bedouins' property, which comprised a rifle by an English maker, with Martini-Henri action, sighted up to five hundred yards, a rather antiquated Snider, and a hare which had been caught in a noose. Neither of the rifles was loaded; they travel light these Bedouin, and ride hard. On the arrival of the Sheikh I thought it best to assume indifference, so joining the group by the fire I passed round my tobacco-pouch and smoked the pipe of peace, too polite

A Vagabond in Asia

and considerate to object to the entertainment of Moussa's friends. The conversation naturally turned on myself. Moussa told them that I had come to Basra from over the sea and was bound for Stamboul. When they asked if I could speak Arabic, he replied that I only knew the words for hot water and Damascus, which was untrue ; I owe Moussa a grudge for that speech, but it raised a laugh. I had never seen the old man so jocular.

As he ejaculated the word for hot water he nudged me and kicked the kettle with his foot, then pointing along the track to Damascus, he muttered the words "Scham, Scham!" whereat the Bedouin laughed more than ever, which was not reassuring. I left Moussa to play the cards ; he was a good actor and knew his audience. I smiled unintelligently at his jest, pretending not to understand a word. Moussa's voice was always a mild protest, but now it seemed more gently protesting than ever ; as I looked at him

In the Nearer East

he seemed to me to become more aged and reverent, almost pathetic in his confidence and trustfulness in the goodness of human nature and of Bedouin nature in particular. He was a lovable old man at all times. I felt that the Sheikh wished himself well out of the business when Moussa handed him the coffee. I even began to have hopes that our acting might prove a reality, and that, owing to Moussa's tact, we, the tolerant hosts, might be allowed to go on our way after parting amicably from our uninvited guests. But soon the conversation took dangerous ground. It was a question of toll; Moussa was explaining to them about my letter of credit, and they were incredulous or pretended to be so. They demanded ransom; Moussa protested; they insisted. Their voices grew higher and more menacing; but Moussa bowed his head sadly and I knew that he was saying: "The *feringhi* has got no money.

How can I give you gold?" Then at

A Vagabond in Asia

a sign from the Sheikh one of his rascally followers mounted my camel and rode off. The others followed and Moussa and I were left alone. As the Bedouin rode away, to use the words of a certain war correspondent, I wished that I had never seen a camel, nor the desert, nor the light of day.

We piled the mails and all our kit on the back of one laden dromedary, and started walking, very dejectedly and disconsolately, back towards Baghdad. I led the camel, and the old man shambled behind. He spoke but one word, "Baghdad," dwelling on the guttural with such a bitter deep-drawn sigh, that I remembered wondering at the time how anybody could dream of spelling the word without the *h*.

The Bedouin rode on ahead, and in less than an hour's time they had disappeared into the horizon towards the encampment we had marked the night before. I felt that we had not seen the last of them. It was a dismal procession, Moussa and I and

In the Nearer East

the camel. The old man walked with difficulty, but after a while I persuaded him to mount. My mind was chiefly occupied in calculating how many days it would take us to reach Hitt, and in picturing the ignominious return to Baghdad. I dreaded more than anything the insincere condolences of all the people who could say, "I told you so;" the bitterest part of all was that they really had told me so. If the Bedouin were trying to force my hand they had succeeded, for I would have given them all my possessions then, if they would only give me back the camel, with just enough food to take me through to Scham, and clothes enough to prevent me from perishing with cold on the way. I knew the Turkish Government subsidised the sheikhs of the tribes to allow the post an unmolested passage through their country. That is why the mails are entrusted to a single old man. An escort would be useless against such odds; or at least any escort whose expenses would not be un-

A Vagabond in Asia

reasonably disproportionate to the end in view. The Bedouin know this. Their security is unassailable ; they may plunder and pillage, but no vengeance can overtake them.

The Turkish Government does not hold itself responsible for any chance wayfarer who may accompany the post, and they would never attempt to send a punitive force into the desert. The only way in which they can avenge an outrage is by seizing any member of a suspected tribe who may venture near Hitt or Damascus to purchase camp-necessaries in the bazaars ; but that is a very slight hold, as these nomad people might be hundreds of miles away before news of an outrage could reach the Turkish authorities in Baghdad. After all, the only protection one has in the desert is the good nature of the Bedouin themselves. The worst of them will generally leave a traveller enough food to carry him to the nearest place of safety. They have been known to take a good

In the Nearer East

dromedary and give in exchange an inferior beast of their own ; in Damascus there is a story of a traveller who arrived in his shirt. But it is several years since a European has accompanied the post. The Bedouin of the Palmyra desert will never kill unless resistance is shown. I was warned of this, and had hidden my revolver in the very bottom of my portmanteau. Moussa carried a useless old blunderbuss through the safe and populous valley of the Euphrates, but having no wish to present it to the Bedouin he left it behind at Hitt. The old man proved my salvation, as I am going to tell.

We had been walking the best part of two hours when we sighted the Bedouin again on our left. They had dismounted by a small pool of water and as we drew nearer they called out to us to join them. I was for going on, but Haji Moussa decreed otherwise, and I obeyed him in all things. Up to this moment I had felt little anxiety for my personal safety. I

A Vagabond in Asia

had expected to be searched and robbed, perhaps even to be stripped to the shirt, but as we approached the Bedouin a second time it occurred to me that they might have held counsel together and decided that, since they had stolen one valuable dromedary, it might be better to provide against news of the incident reaching Baghdad. The situation was a little difficult. We formed another ring but this time there was no fire, nor coffee, nor play-acting. Moussa was protesting expostulating, entreating. He told them that the camel was his own, that he was a poor old man and a *haji*, and that the *feringhi* had no money. During this scene he concealed in his mouth two English sovereigns, which I had given him when we first sighted the Bedouin ; it was all the money I carried. Meanwhile I listened as before, an interested and unintelligent spectator. I could see that Moussa was convincing the Sheikh about my letter of credit. The Sheikh's manner

In the Nearer East

reassured me; and the disappointed baffled expression of his two sinister looking dependants reassured me still more. The two others who completed the group were of the same type as the Sheikh, and seemed to reflect his every mood, which was also reassuring. At last my two portmanteaux and bag were brought forward and searched. The Sheikh presided with scrupulous politeness, for all the world like an officer in the Marseilles custom-house. He passed his hand lightly over everything, taking care not to disarrange the packing. All my European kit, dress-clothes, shirts, collars, ties and articles of toilet were passed, and my revolver escaped notice at the bottom of the bag. I was travelling very light. The Sheikh appropriated an Arab turban cloth, but he was much too considerate to deprive me of any articles of European fashion; he had no hankering after curiosities. The provisions were calculated and apportioned; his men fell on their

A Vagabond in Asia

share rapaciously, like dogs ; and then we were allowed enough to continue on our way. But which was our way? That was the question I was burning to answer. The weary trudge on foot to Hitt and the ignominy of the return by caravan road to Baghdad, or the long desert ride to Damascus, the now almost impossible goal of my desires? I was not held long in doubt. The Sheikh, with a wave of his hand, signified that the inspection was over. Moussa loaded both camels and motioned me to mount ; then, with a *Salaam Aleikoum*, he bade the Bedouin god-speed and turned his camel's head to Scham. At the same moment the Bedouin mounted and rode away in the opposite direction. They had tried to force my hand, and found that I held no cards.

As we rode on Moussa lifted his open palms to Allah and laughed. There was no merriment in the sound ; it was rather the laugh of a man whose smiles mark

In the Nearer East

epochs in his existence. For a moment his face was transfigured; the brows lifted, the white teeth flashed a revelation and closed; it was like the opening and shutting of a prophetic book.

So we rode on side by side to Scham, over the boundless desolation; bleak, undulating plain, and rocky ravine, barren sandhills, and interminable stretches of yellow, brown, and grey, grey, brown, and yellow. Sometimes a startled hare would cross our path, or a flock of desert wheatear; but often we would ride on for hours, spanning horizon after horizon without view of living thing, through tracts too starved and desolate to lend a niggard sustenance to the scant thorn-bush. We were riding in the early morning when the sun rose, and the brown earth glowed beneath us, a burnished plain, and a thousand little spearheads glinted and glistened as they caught the rays. We were riding through the day, and at sunset when the violet screen faded in the

A Vagabond in Asia

west, and through the long hours of night until the seventh star of the Plough had climbed high above the sky line. So we rode on for six days after the Bedouin left us, only halting an hour for our morning and evening meal, and six hours at night to snatch a welcome sleep ; until one morning I woke to find the mountains of Damascus heaped around us, and to hear in the distance the tinkle of a sheep-bell. Then we urged on our spent camels to the Arab paradise of Scham. The sense of life grew upon us slowly ; but when our hearts were warmed by the surprise of the first tree, and the unimaginable delight of fresh, green grass and flowers and running water, Moussa broke into song ; and I wondered, for these things were miracles in my eyes.

IN THE SOUTHERN
SHAN STATES

In the Southern Shan States

I

TO TAUNGGYI

.
IN the train I had a Burman and his wife for companions ; the Burman was not too garrulous, and his wife charming. Soon after leaving Rangoon the good lady composed herself to her devotions. Nothing could have been more affecting than the way in which she poured her hopes and her misgivings into the ear of her deity. Her accents were at once earnest confidential, soft and refined ; the god who would not hear must, indeed, be hewn of stone.

A Vagabond in Asia

After prayer she commenced toilet. Her hair was long and ample, but she did not disdain the addition of an alien plait. Nature and artifice combined could best produce the most prodigal effect ; she saw nothing grotesque in the union of the two. Nor was there ; for to her there was neither nature nor art, but the grateful acceptance of both as essential and divinely-ordained by the universal spirit to whom she made her prayer. There was something refreshing in the way she swung her tresses left and right, with dainty neatness scattering the fragrance of betel nut through the stuffy carriage like incense from a censer. In toilet and devotion there was an utter want of self-consciousness, no boldness nor shyness either. So might a water rat smooth his glossy fur unobserved in some secure retreat, the stream his looking-glass.

The next morning I offered her a cigarette which she accepted and smoked



A CHILD OF NATURE.

In the Southern Shan States

gracefully. Afterwards she presented me with a handful of zoological biscuits.

Oh enlightened civilization of the nineteenth century ! Where must we seek the perfection of good manners ? Is good breeding confined to the courts of Europe alone ; or is it in the pagan homes of the East that we must look for that perfect simplicity and naturalness void of any taint or suspicion of what is vulgar or coarse ? When a lady is able to do her hair and perform her devotions in a first class carriage of the Brighton express, so naturally and gracefully as to excite neither comment nor ridicule, and to smoke a cigarette and nibble at zoological biscuits without loss of dignity or self-respect ; then, perhaps, we will have arrived at that pitch of perfection from which we have been receding for the last few hundred years.

The Burman lady was good to look upon. I leant back in the carriage and thought of the *gaucherie* and self-conscious-

A Vagabond in Asia

ness of the drawing-room, the vulgarity of middle-class Europe. I thought of the New Woman, and sighed.

.

The train deposited me at Thazi junction, where I spent the day profitably in securing coolies to carry my kit to Taunggyi, and in obtaining a little rat of a pony, barely twelve hands high, unshod, innocent of corn and the luxuries of a European stable, but as strong and well-plucked as the Bhutia pony of the Himalayas. This little paragon of horseflesh started by bolting with me for two miles : he carried me five hundred during the six weeks that I had him, and he was game to the last. For the loan of him I paid the princely sum of thirty rupees.

I despatched my coolies at mid-day and spent the afternoon in the station refreshment room enjoying the luxuries of iced drinks, knowing that it would be the last time for many weeks. In the evening I left Thazi in the hurried manner I have

In the Southern Shan States

suggested, riding by moonlight to Hglaindet, the first stage, which I left in the grey before dawn after a short snatch of sleep. The sun had risen two hours when I reached Yemebin, the second stage. I rested my pony there an hour ; then mounted and rode on again along a dusty road winding along a river bed, now almost dry in February, to Pinyoung, the third stage, and thirty miles from Thazi. Pinyoung is at the foot of the hills ; there is a wealth of colour here. The air is fragrant with the scent of the beautiful *Bauhinia*, whose pink and creamy flowers are as thick as apple blossom in May. Precipitous limestone cliffs indicate the gateway to the Shan country, but there is another ten miles yet before we reach the frontier.

Spring and Autumn are blended. In the background burnt yellow grass carpets the slope to the steep red crag which is gashed with veins of white rock ; the whole is overgrown with trees in various stages

A Vagabond in Asia

of apparel. Some are gaunt and bare ; others are now putting on their spring verdure. The red and gold of the great *sâl* leaves suggest a perpetual autumn. Everywhere the rocks are hung with a luxuriant blue convolvulus. The river banks are redolent of spring.

There is plenty of game here in the valley, which is seldom shot over ; but a shikar means a stay of some days at Pinyoung, and beaters have to be secured. On one occasion the *chaukidar* of the P.W.D. bungalow was incarcerated here in a state of siege and terror by a man-eating tiger. To rest the "tat," I sent him on in the evening to Nanpandet and followed on foot the next morning. At Nanpandet the road leaves the river and ascends very gradually to Wetpuiyi. This is the most beautiful part of the journey. The Shan hills are delightfully sylvan after the Himalayas : they have none of the grandeur and magnificence of the greater range ; but the richness in colour and

In the Southern Shan States

detail, the perfect grace of contour, the absence of any feature tending to the abnormal or grotesque, the freshness and greenness of Spring are more suggestive of a Western Arcadia; as though the Creator wearied of gorgeous monotony in the East had planted this blessed plot of seclusion as a retreat from the stress and languor of the Indies. It might be the home of Pan or the garden of the Hesperides.

At Kalaw, the next stage, the aspect of the country changes. Here we reach an extensive undulating plateau not unlike the Sussex downs. In a few miles we descend to yet another variety of country. The road is skirted by a broad expanse of terraced paddy fields, and as we approach Thāmakham it does not require the broad face of the setting sun to bring to our minds the margin of the fens. On the left a muddy little brook flows with an almost imperceptible current. Clay has replaced the richer

A Vagabond in Asia

loam. Dismount and examine the stream : you will find the caddis worm at home in his wooden house ; this one has fortified himself with walls of shell. The insect with the long extenuated legs is skimming the water as of old. There is even a yellow buttercup on the bank. The reed warbler sways on the long bent rush. There is nothing in the acres of upturned soil to tell what crop is expected there. The pagoda in that knoll amongst the clumps of trees a mile away is the village church ; only the spire tops the foliage. Twilight is hiding the tell tale bamboos.

At Thamakham the *chaukidar* is not to be found, and a Taungthu lady takes charge of my pony. Her costume is original enough to dispel any illusion of the fens. A rather old-fashioned black evening dress, cut narrowly but deep at the bosom descends to a little above the knees. There is no waist

In the Southern Shan States

and no other garment except a petticoat of equally short design, and a flowing black head dress that resembles a widow's weeds. The neck and bosom would not excite comment at an evening party in Upper Tooting, but to a pair of plump calves, that are devoid of other covering, are attached gawdy metal garters of a somewhat unique pattern. The effect is quaint and pleasing. I noticed afterwards that many of them wore gaiters.

I rode on the next day to Heho and Sinhe over a wide plateau margined here and there by small conical mounds. The scenery was not imposing. I had wired to Taunggyi from Thamakhan, the only telegraph office on the road, and found a pony waiting for me at Sinhe to carry me the last ten miles of the way. The active little beast clambered up a precipitous *pak dandi* reducing this last stage by half. We arrived at Taunggyi at noon, having

A Vagabond in Asia

completed our journey of a hundred and six miles in three days and a half. This was a record, as Taunggyi had only been visited by government servants, who receive ten rupees a day travelling allowance and often spend ten days over the journey which is a pleasant one. The excellent P.W.D. Inspection Bungalows made travelling easy and even comfortable. Many of them are provided with a small library of books and magazines, the gift of some sympathetic traveller in the past. No doubt this beneficent person had kicked his heels in impatience for hours at a time, cursing the dilatoriness of his Burman coolies, who were probably chewing betel nut by the wayside. The breed is not famed for despatch.

The first view of Taunggyi offers the suggestion of a premeditated hoax. The path that led us through the fragrant groves and valleys of a demi-Eden plunged again for a moment into the

In the Southern Shan States

heat and dust of the plains, but we were reassured by the hills that broke the horizon in front, in whose lap we were told Taunggyi rested. One could not help feeling that all the luxuriance of the scenery through which we had passed, was merely the fitting access to a country more exquisitely endowed with the prodigalities of nature. Now at last we were approaching the City Beautiful itself. But here was bathos. Imagine a few detached Brixton villas, a shed or two with corrugated iron roofs, some landlord's model cottages, and a residency with a flagstaff that suggests a roomy seaside boarding house fronting a fashionable esplanade; add a sprinkling of native houses; scatter the group over a dismal treeless flat, and you have Taunggyi. The picture is saved from the abject commonplace by a wooded hill that guards it on the east, hogbacked, with crags strewn towards the summit, topped with a pagoda or two.

A Vagabond in Asia

Taunggyi, the headquarters of government in the Southern Shan States, is not marked in the Times Atlas. Even in Rangoon one has some difficulty in finding any one who has ever been there. The capital, if I may call it so, comprises quite a small European colony and a hospitable club which, consisted of ten members at the time of my visit. Visitors are few, judging by the cards on the wall, and I was the first English traveller who had been there, not on duty bound. But however remote Taunggyi may be it is not too remote for cricket, and it is worth a journey so far to watch the Shan's earliest attempts at the wicket. His first impression seems to be that the ball is an object to be demolished, and he clubs it down on the ground with the greatest ferocity. In the field he exposes his body recklessly, his hands being the last part of him which he considers the proper medium of obstruction.

In the Southern Shan States

Taunggyi is for the most part peopled by Taungthus, Shans, Burmans, Chinamen, Panthes and the natives of India. The dress of the Taungthus, or hill people, is a thick padded black jacket, such as is used for fencing at home, and a pair of black or white roomy trousers resembling more a divided skirt.

The women wear the weird costume I have described. There is little difference in the dress of Shan and Burman; the Shans are fairer and more Mongolian in appearance. The Panthes are the Chinese Mahomedans who come from Yunnan over the frontier, and carry on a large traffic in mules and opium. Most of the trade at Taunggyi, as everywhere else in this part of the world, is in the hands of Chinamen, Mussulmans and Hindoos.

Twenty miles to the south-west of Taunggyi lies the great lake, a fine expanse of water, ten miles in length and three in breadth. Fort Stedman, our

A Vagabond in Asia

garrison in the Southern Shan States, is built on the north-east shore. The lake is peopled by Enⁿthas, or lake men, a curious folk who differ from other men in that they neglect their arms as secondary appendages and do the greater part of their work with their legs. You may see them draining the paddy fields by the lake side with a crude wooden ladle which they manipulate with their feet. When they paddle their long beaked canoes they stand one at the bow and two at the stern leaning over the water, balanced on one foot, and plying the oar lustily with the other. By inserting it in the hollow of the knee, they get a firm leverage somehow between the calf and thigh, steadying the end with one hand. A 'crab' would be fatal, but the Enⁿthas are good watermen. It is a weird sight to see them swinging rhythmically in time and skimming over the water at a pace that would put the average fen-man to shame. Another peculiarity of the Enⁿtha is that he is

In the Southern Shan States

afflicted with a kind of shibboleth, so that he is powerless to pronounce the letter s. In his mouth it becomes th. These strange people live in huts supported by stalwart bamboo props on artificial islands of weed. Their chief occupation is fishing. There is good duck and snipe shooting by the lake, and the Enthas are very clever at spearing wounded duck and teal, which have a habit of diving when hit, and become entangled in the impenetrable forest of water weed, which extends over the whole lake two or three feet below the surface.

The States, as everyone knows, are at present independent under British protection. The Sawbwas or chiefs are a quiet people not given to fighting, though in Theebaw's time their little armies used to jump at each other's throats and kill each other off like Kilkenny cats. It was the policy of the late King of Burma to set them on and watch the fun. But we have changed all that, and the Shan

A Vagabond in Asia

Sawbwa is now a respectable, peace-loving, English-fearing member of society, pleased with a little attention, and taking an innocent pride in the little pomps and vanities of his miniature court. There is no doubt that Taunggyi is well chosen for our head-quarters in the Southern Shan States. From a sanitary point of view it is quite the best situation between Meiktila and the Salween. The climate is much the same as in England, the thermometer rarely exceeding 86 in the shade in the summer or falling below 40 in the winter. The elevation is between four and five thousand feet. English fruit—pears, apples, strawberries, and raspberries thrive here, and there are extensive Government fruit and vegetable gardens that supply the inhabitants with these luxuries. Taunggyi would make an excellent hill station, and sanatorium for Burma; but at present it is too inaccessible, and now that Government is opening out Maymyo it is extremely improbable that there

In the Southern Shan States

will ever be a railway there. In the Northern Shan States, on the other hand, a railway is in course of construction that will bring us nearer the Chinese frontier. There remains for Taunggyi then, in all probability, an unmerited obscurity,—an obscurity so impenetrable that its seclusion can only be surmised from the fact that no American has been known to set foot there.

II

TO THE SALWEEN

If Taunggyi is the end of civilisation, or, more properly, a detached nest of it (for end implies some connection with centre); it would seem that a journey eastward would land us nowhere until we had crossed the great expanse of Siam and China and arrived in Hong-Kong: but two hundred and seventy miles from this little station is the small garrison of Kentung, the remotest perhaps in the British possessions. A road good enough for riding and pack bullocks connects the two. It is on record that once an officer not on duty took this journey and more lately an adventurous French lady traveller passed en route

In the Southern Shan States

for Siam and China; beyond these no European traveller is remembered at Kentung with the exception of the few Government officials whose duty takes them there. Why a district so inviting in its natural resources has not proved more attractive to naturalist, sportsman, and traveller it is difficult to imagine.

The country is extremely interesting, and in most parts beautiful. Game, it is true, is nowhere abundant. Yet there is sport enough of that desultory kind, and a stroll with a gun in the woods and marshes in the early morning or after the day's ride should be productive of a varied bag. Partridge, duck and snipe are fairly plentiful, and one sometimes meets with a hare or peacock. There are deer too on the hill side, but they are difficult to approach without beaters. Big game is very scarce between Taunggyi and the Salween. Bear are supposed to inhabit the 7000 feet range, and the villagers of Saikaw are

A Vagabond in Asia

sometimes startled by a tiger; but the Shan is no sportsman, though he often carries a gun, and the resources of the country in shikar have never been explored. Our day's régime was to get up early in the morning, and after an hour or two's shooting to ride after the coolies and have breakfast by some stream or village where there was water; then after a short rest to pass them again and tether our horses to the *zayat* where we intended to sleep; so that when we returned at night, tired and hungry after our second shoot, we found the camp fire blazing and the spoils of the morning ready for our repast.

The first stage from Taunggyi to Hopong is uninteresting, but in the next, from Hopong to Sauawn, we see the Shan country at its best. Sauawn is a charming little village nestling at the foot of the hills. Most of the inhabitants are Taungthus who seem to lead the ideal rustic life; a little work in the

In the Southern Shan States

paddy fields, a little gossip at the Phoon-ghee Kyang, and a frequency of religious junketings complete their daily round. The arrival of a *thekin* in their midst must be quite an event: probably most of the villagers could count the white men they have seen on the fingers of one hand.

On both occasions that I passed through Sauawn some religious festival was being celebrated. From a *zayat* in the pagoda compound an invisible priest was addressing his congregation. The men were clustered round him in the structure itself so as to hide him from view; the women in their black dresses knelt devoutly outside, their hands clasped in prayer. The priest assumed that monotonous chant which is peculiar to the interpreters of all creeds. Little children were bringing offerings of sweet smelling flowers. As I passed I noticed a whispering amongst the female portion of the congregation. Necks were strained to catch a glimpse

A Vagabond in Asia

of the unusual visitor: some swung round without pretence; the more pious preserved an attitude steadfastly devout, their eyes fixed on the spot whence the priest's voice came.

Nature has conspired to give these folk a temple worthy of their devotion. In the centre of the village by the Phoongee Kyang rises a picturesque little hill of solid limestone rock, overgrown with the fragrant white Bauhinia, and surrounded at the foot by feathery bamboos. A little natural cave on the side facing the pagodas is converted into a shrine, approached by steps hewn out of the rock. Here is placed the image of the ever placid Buddha, surrounded by his invariable attendants; at his feet is thrown an apron of rich texture; the ceiling is gorgeously painted; and offerings of flowers and grain are scattered on the stone ledges. One may always wander about in such places unmolested; Burman and Shan alike are most broad-

In the Southern Shan States

mindful and tolerant of unbelievers, a strange contrast to the fanatics of Islam who resent an eye glance at their holy places. On the other side of the rock is a considerable cavern, lofty and fantastically grooved, a favourite nesting place for doves. At the top a jagged pinnacle surmounts the trees, on the summit of which some pious devotees had erected a miniature pagoda, conspicuous for miles. The Shan looks upon each conical peak or prominence of jutting rock as naturally ordained for the loftiest end—the basis of the pagoda. He reserves for Buddha the highest place.

The spirit is characteristic of Buddhism. I have noticed it amongst the Lamas of the Himalayas and Sikkim, who decorate the most inaccessible crags with their chortens and praying flags, and build their monasteries on the sheer hill side.

Childhood at Sauawn must be idyllic.

A Vagabond in Asia

I can imagine no more charming place for the youthful vagabond and bird's nester. Here in spring are orchards of wild crab trees in full blossom, and a sweet scented May. Here are rocky dells and shady groves, in which the peacock wanders, a dazzling apparition, seven feet of gaudy plumage. In the morning and evening you may hear his weird piteous cry and track him down to a secluded nook amongst the rocks by the stream side where he struts in all his pride, his long tail following like a shadow behind. Doves are cooing all day long; they build their nests in the bamboos; two delicate transparent white eggs are deposited on the thinnest layer of straw, just where the little leaves form a circuit round the stem, so that one can look up from below, and see the eggs through the nests and the blue sky over all. Cuckoos are calling in the fresh green leaves of the crab apple. The jungle cock is crowing in the paddy

In the Southern Shan States

field, his comb thrown back, surrounded by an admiring circle of dowdy hens. He would be a prize fowl at a poultry show at home, but here he knows no master, and he will allow you to approach no nearer than a hundred yards. It is spring in the Shan States and the trees are green, and most of them fragrant and in full blossom, though the earth is still brown and burned before the rains. Little brooks meet and chatter and part again; and one is reminded of the vision of Kubla Khan. Sauawn is a typical Shan village.

The villages on the maidan too have their charm, with their enormous spreading pipal trees and their quaint old ruined pagodas, niched and moss-grown, guarded by monstrous and impossible images of stone. It is delightful to make a halt for breakfast by the wayside pipal, or smoking a mid-day pipe, to lie and look up into its branches. Each limb is like the great stalwart trunk of the chestnut,

A Vagabond in Asia

in colour a reddish brown dappled with white blotches. The foliage is thick and strong like laurel leaves, matted into a roof that the fiercest sun is powerless to penetrate. My pony always tries to bolt across the maidan to the shelter of one of these trees, which in the Shan States take the place of the village inn. Here the Panthes tether their mules which they have brought across the Salween all the way from the Siam frontier. Here Burman, Shan and Chinaman are boiling rice in their chatties, grouped around their separate fires. There are nooks and corners enough amongst the spreading roots to afford cook houses for the *chefs* of every nation. The quietness is surprising: everyone moves in a subdued business-like manner, as though determined to make the best of a short respite from the weary march. To turn aside from the dusty road to the shade of the pipal tree is like entering the seclusion of some grand mediæval cathedral after the bustle and

In the Southern Shan States

turmoil of a noisy street. The coolness and stillness are as refreshing ; the magnificence of the branches, the luxuriance of the leaves are worthy of the comparison. Through them one can see the blue above in little patches, a roof gloriously embossed.

The next march from Sauawn to Mongpawm is across the Loi Saing range that rises to 8,099 feet at Loi Maw some sixty miles to the south. Mongpawm is a large village, the capital of a State of the same name. Between Mongpawm and Banping are the Loi Sampu hills, reaching an elevation of 6,800 feet at their highest point. All this part of the country is extremely pretty. Then one comes to an undulating plateau that extends for three marches from Banping to Wafpalep, Wanaing and Hko-ut. One never loses sight of the hills, and the country is dotted with little isolated mounds rising to the height of some hundred feet. The average elevation of the plateau is about 3,000 feet.

A Vagabond in Asia

At Banping we were startled by gun reports in the middle of the night, when the darkness was so dense we could not see a yard in front of us: it was much too dark to shoot anything, and I have never been able to find out the cause of the firing. I have heard that the timid Shan fires in the night to re-assure himself and to warn his imaginary foes that he is quite prepared for hostilities: more probably the custom is connected with some superstitious observance: possibly the guns were fired to frighten away the evil spirits. The Shan is not courageous. On one occasion I was shooting in a wood, a little distance from the road side when I came across some dozen men crouching amongst the bamboos. They had heard my gun and directly they saw that I had noticed them they took to their heels and ran as fast as they could, and did not stop until they had put a mile between us. Young boys nearly always run at the approach of a white man, but that is not

In the Southern Shan States

surprising, when one thinks of the tales of nats and goblins which they are taught to believe from their earliest infancy. Not many years ago the Shans were a warlike people ; each State had its little army, and there were constant differences between the Sawbwas which were invariably encouraged by the late King of Burma ; the differences generally ended in bloodshed and the country became much depopulated. Many villages are now half empty, some entirely deserted.

At Hko-ut the river Teng is crossed by a ferry ; mahseer are plentiful in this river : some enormous fellows of twenty pounds or more can generally be seen basking near the bank, but they are much too wary to be taken by a spoon, and the natives have found no means of catching them. An Englishman does not look his best when he is ineffectually thrashing the water with an 18 foot rod and the latest lure from Manton's in the shape of an elaborate silver spoon ; a crowd of good-natured,

A Vagabond in Asia

lazy Shans will soon gather round him and watch with an amused interest the mad *theikin's* efforts to achieve the impossible.

To the ornithologist, naturalist and small game sportsman this part of the Shan States would be a paradise. Between Hko-ut and Pangke I saw duck, teal, snipe, heron, kingfisher, water-hen, partridge, pheasant, green pigeon, dove, peacock, parrot, hoopoe, hornbill, jungle fowl and every imaginable kind of bird. I also met with several kinds of butterflies that I had not seen before. The flora is very rich. Orchid dealers have already sent natives to collect for them in the Southern Shan States, and several new species have been found. In March the beautiful *Vanda coerulescens* is conspicuous on the tree trunks. At an elevation of 5,000 feet the flora is almost European; in the neighbourhood of Taunggyi the wild dog rose (*Rosa Gigantea*) and the wild pear (*Pyrus Pashia*) are abundant.

In the Southern Shan States

The commonest flowers in the hills are a delicate little pink *Primula (Forbesii)* and the creamy white *Leucas hyssoipifolia*. The most remarkable feature of the flora of these parts is the abundance of the *Papilionaceæ* or bean order. Soon after leaving Pangke one arrives at the most ideally sylvan little hollow imaginable; a bubbling leafy brook relieves the arid monotony of the country; beside a rustic bridge of wood grows a real horse chestnut, now (in March) in full flower. A crimson cotton tree mingles its gorgeous bloom. Over all on the summit of a precipitous rock clusters a wealth of lilac; at least in an English garden one might take one's Bible oath it was nothing else; botanists will tell you it is *Congea Tomentosa* a shrub that adds so much to the beauty of the banks of the Salween. The sweet-scented, creamy *Bauhinia* blossom joins in the conspiracy to make the place beautiful.

There is no lack of smaller flowers, and

A Vagabond in Asia

the rocks abound with wild lettuce, lichen and ferns of a peculiar freshness.

On the way to Saikaw, the next stage, we met a long train of Panthes driving some two or three hundred mules. They wear large sunhats of the harvest pattern, generally decorated with a green tassel; a short coat and knicks of butcher's blue. Nearly all of them carry guns which may be purchased, I was told, at four rupees eight annas in the Kengtung bazaar. The Arms Act is not in force in the Shan States. Many of the Saikaw villagers have ancient muzzle-loaders and the ideal of the Shan sportsman is to shoot a peacock. He will follow a bird for hours from tree to tree until it has reached its absolutely last resting place for the night; then he will crouch low and manipulate his antique fowling piece, loaded as often as not with ends of superannuated telegraph wire. It is odds on the peacock. There is a magnificent tree about half a mile south of the village, which is inhabited by

In the Southern Shan States

a nat: in the early morning it is a sure find for jungle fowl which come to eat the grain that is offered daily by the villagers to the evil spirit.

An eight-mile ride from Saikaw brings us down to an elevation of 1,050 feet at Kengkham, a large village on the banks of the Nam Pang, six miles from its junction with the Salween. The Kengtung route crosses the Salween at Takaw Ferry, full fifty miles above the junction. As my coolies were in a state of mutiny and refused to go further than Kengkham I obtained a guide and rode on without them to the Salween at its nearest point and back on the same day. Some of the glimpses of the Nam Pang river on the way surpass any river scenery I have seen.

The stream is islanded above and below. The densely wooded banks rise almost precipitously to a thousand feet; the rocks are aglow with the luxuriant lilac *congea*, a creeper that colours and beautifies the whole landscape. I enjoyed a delicious

A Vagabond in Asia

bathe in the Salween; then I rode back towards Taunggyi. I shall always remember my journey in the Southern Shan States as the most pleasant experience of a three years' sojourn in the East. I passed through a variety of country, mountains and valleys and undulating plateaus, pine-clad hills, burnt plains, deep forests, bamboo jungle and cultivated paddy fields, an incongruous medley of West and East of which my most enduring impressions are the Myosah and his retinue amongst the palm trees of Kengkham and the orchards of blossoming crab-apple in the Highland village of Salween. The scenery is everywhere pretty and in places beautiful; the climate healthy and breezy; the people good natured and hospitably inclined. With a gun thrown over his shoulders and a game little Burman tat beneath him, clear weather overhead, the mountains behind, and the wide grassy plain before, what more can the vagabond desire?

III

A GREAT PRINCE

THE Myosah of Kengkham was crossing the river. His subjects awaited him on the other side. On the raft that bore him were huddled his army of thirty men, volunteers in the Royal service, who were content to eat the King's meat and follow in his train. The band squatted in the bows. The Myosah himself was surrounded by the retainers of his household. His pony, resplendent in its golden trappings, stood beside him, unmoved by all his pomp.

The Vagabond sat on the *zayat* steps by the riverside, waiting events. The raft was so near now, he could see the band quite plainly. It had opened a little red betel box, and was shaving the

A Vagabond in Asia

precious nut carefully with its metal pincers, preparatory to another chew.

The Myosah, his army, and the officers of State were entrusted to one rude barge, merely a platform of bamboo roughly lashed to two hollowed tree trunks. Even the exchequer was endangered, for he was returning from his annual tour, and carried with him the revenue of the whole State. How the hearts of the subjects on the bank must have beat !

Now the ferry has reached the shore in safety. The band is the first to disembark ; its only instrument, a brazen gong, strikes a note to signify the home-coming. The army follows ; thirty stalwart Shans, in various stages of undress, squat on a circle on the ground ; each is armed with an antique muzzle-loading Tower rifle. Next the Myosah's pony leaps from the raft with all the *savoir-faire* of a circus horse. Last of all the Myosah himself struts forward with an easy swagger to meet the Englishman.

In the Southern Shan States

He is a thin, spare, delicate little figure, who stands no higher than four feet ten in his shoes, and looks as if a puff from one of his men would blow him over. The shoes he commits to the keeping of the groom of the bed-chamber.

The Englishman alone is unacquainted with the Court etiquette. His interpreter comes to the rescue.

“Shake hands, sir! all Shan Sawbwas much like shake hands.” The Englishman shook hands.

The Myosah inquired what happy fortune had brought the illustrious stranger to his land. The Englishman answered that he had left his country to travel round the world, and had first turned his steps to the kingdom of Kengkham.

The Prince bowed a graceful acknowledgment to the compliment, and asked the Englishman whether he intended to visit his neighbour, the Sawbwa of Kengtung.

The Englishman replied that having

A Vagabond in Asia

seen the fairest city of the Shans, he would go no further. On the way home he might visit Mandalay, and afterwards perhaps the Empire of India.

The Prince smiled; he knew that there was more in the white man's words than the empty flattery of an Oriental Court. For a moment his eye rested lovingly on the beautiful Nam Pang river, whose blue and green waters flowed by the village where he was born. Above, the stream was islanded and broken into a thousand little cataracts of white foam. Below, it sped silently through the flowering forests where the crimson cotton tree mingled its gorgeous blossoms with the creamy white Bauhinia, and the rocks were crowned with a luxuriant lilac creeper that caught and held the golden lights of the setting sun. Surely, thought the Myosah, the flowers are gayer, the palms taller, the pagodas richer, and the women fairer at Kengkham than anywhere else.

The Englishman was the first to break

In the Southern Shan States

the silence. "Are you fond of travelling?" he said.

"The business of my kingdom is too great," replied the Myosah. "I should dearly like to go to Mone over the mountains there. Perhaps some day I may be able. Who knows?"

"You live in such a beautiful place, I wonder you can ever make up your mind to go away," said the Englishman; and then, as an afterthought, "We should be deeply honoured to see the Myosah of Kengham at our Court in England," This, with a wave of the hand, proffering a regal invitation.

"But my kingdom?" objected the Myosah.

"Our Prince finds time—" began the Englishman; but the interpreter interrupted him.

"No, sir, don't say that. Sawbwa will be very angry." Why the Sawbwa should be angry the Vagabond was never able to find out.

A Vagabond in Asia

Darkness was gathering on the village. On the other side of the wooden palisade that guards the Royal compound in Kengkham, the Myosah's wives were waiting his embrace. He had been long away.

And so the representatives of two nations parted.

The Myosah presented the Englishman with three cocoanuts, a bunch of plantains, and some sweet oil.

His Highness was graciously pleased to accept a box of cabin biscuits from the stranger, and a few empty twelve-bore cartridges.

Then the band got up. The gong sounded; the groom of the bedchamber put the Myosah's shoes on his feet; the army rose; and the procession passed away into the shadow of the mango trees. * * *

THE END

